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MYSTERY MAGAZINE



JUNE 1982

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THE ASSASSINATION OF MICHAEL SHAYNE

by Brett Halliday

Kill Mike Shayne? A great many would-be assassins had tried — and all of them had failed. But this time it was an entirely different kind of game they were playing! 4

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THE ASSASSINATION OF MICHAEL SHAYNE

by BRETT HALLIDAY

MICHAEL SHAYNE HAD SENT LUCY HAMILTON TO THE BANK, which was why he was alone in the office when the messenger with the package arrived.

The big redheaded private detective was going through a stack of correspondence that Lucy had typed and left on his desk before going to the bank. Shayne knew how efficient his secretary was; he didn't even bother to scan the letters, sure that Lucy had gotten them down exactly as he had dictated them. Instead, he was just scrawling his signature at the bottom of each of them before tossing them into a separate pile.

The knock on the outer door made him look up. Lucy had left the connecting door between offices open, as she usually did when she was going to be away from her desk. Shayne could see the outline of a person through the frosted glass panel of the outer door. He called out, "Yeah, come on in."

The door swung open and a young man put his head through the opening. He was wearing a cap, and even across the length of both offices, Shayne's keen eyes could make out the writing on it. MIAMI MESSENGER SERVICE, it declared, and as the young man wearing it took a tentative step into the outer office, a uniform that went with the cap was revealed, too. The young man said through the open inner door, "I'm looking for a Mr. Michael Shayne."

Shayne grunted, "That's me. What can I do for you?"

There was a cardboard package in the young man's hands. He held it out, balancing a clipboard on top of it. He said, "Package for you, Mr. Shayne," coming on toward the inner office. Shayne stood up to meet him.

"You just sign on line 17 for it," the young man went on. Shayne took the package from him and put it on his old scarred wooden desk, then turned back to take the clipboard that the messenger was now extending to him.

Shayne signed it on line 17, beneath the other signatures that were already there, and gave it back. The messenger smiled and said, "Thank you, Mr. Shayne. Have a nice day."

By the time the young man had closed the door behind him, Shayne was back at his desk, perching a hip on the corner of it as he took out his pocketknife and started to slit the heavy tape that was holding the package closed. A frown was tugging at him heavy red brows. There was no return address on the package, and there had been nothing on the young man's clipboard to indicate where the package had come from.

As far as Shayne remembered, he hadn't ordered anything that would be delivered like this. And he couldn't tell from the box what it was. It was just a simple cardboard box, about six inches on a side, taped up and with his name and office address typed neatly on a plain white label that someone had glued on the cardboard. Maybe Lucy had sent off for something for him, some sort of surprise. But if that was the case, then it shouldn't have come addressed to him.

The questions flashed through Shayne's mind in the few seconds that it took him to cut the tape. Asking questions was so deeply ingrained in him after years in the private investigation business that he sometimes had to remind himself that some things were just exactly what they seemed to be.

This package wasn't.

Shayne swung the lid up, feeling as he did so a slight tug on the cardboard. then there was a loud, sharp pop, and a jet of crimson gas spurted up out of the box, almost into Shayne's face.

He let his instincts, honed by a dangerous career, take over. Flinging the box away from him, he rolled in the opposite direction, over the desk, dropping to the floor behind it and banging his shoulder on his chair as he landed. The old desk was heavy and sturdy, and it would offer more protection than anything else in the office.

Protection from what, was the question. Shayne sniffed the air in the office. Two different odors were overlapping, one a slight tang of exploded powder, the other a more overpowering, flowery smell that

seemed to be coming from the red gas that was rapidly dissipating in the air. Shayne came up out of his crouch and looked intently for a moment at the box, lying where he had thrown it in the corner next to the filing cabinet.

Shayne stood up. The box appeared to be harmless now, and he stepped around the desk and crossed to it with a few long strides. Scooping it off the floor, Shayne turned it so that he could see inside it, and the scowl on his lean, craggy face got deeper.

Inside were two separate contraptions. One of them was along the order of a mousetrap, but instead of catching mice, it set off an exploding cap, the same kind that kids had been using in cap pistols for decades. The other apparatus, sitting next to the first one, featured a small cylinder that Shayne felt sure had contained the perfumey gas. It had been expelled by compressed air and had also been set off by the opening of the lid. The gadgets were imaginative, but nothing spectacular.

It was the note taped to the side of the box that held Shayne's attention.

Dear Michael Shayne, it read, You are now dead. This package contained a highly explosive device that was detonated when you opened it. Thank you for being such a wonderful victim and cooperating in your own assassination. Rest in Peace.

Shayne took a deep breath and said softly, "Damn."

THEN HE WHIRLED AROUND, PUTTING THE PACKAGE BACK on the desk, and hurried out to the hall. The messenger had only been gone for a minute or two; there was a good chance Shayne could catch up to him.

Anger was coursing through him as his long legs carried him down the hall of the office building. Shayne thought he had as good a sense of humor as most people, and he didn't even mind the practical jokes that his friend, reporter Timothy Rourke, sometimes pulled. But this didn't have the brand of one of Rourke's jokes on it. Sending someone a phony bomb just wasn't his style. It was too callous, almost cruel.

Shayne wanted very much to know who would think such a thing was funny, though.

His office was on the second floor of the building, so it was quicker in this case to take the stairs than to wait for the elevator. As he came out into the lobby at a trot, he called across to the clerk on duty behind the desk, "Did a messenger just come through here on his way out?"

The man nodded. "Sure did, Mr. Shayne. You just missed him."

Shayne picked up the pace and ran across the lobby, ignoring the curious stare of the desk clerk. He shouldered through the double glass

doors out onto the sidewalk and jerked his head from side to side, scanning Flagler Street in both directions.

It was early afternoon, and traffic along the street was fairly heavy, but Shayne spotted the car pulling out from the curb close to the end of the block. He saw the driver, who appeared to be alone, reach up and take a cap off his head.

Shayne's eyes darted to the light at the end of the block. It was just turning red, and the car with the messenger in it had to stop, second in line behind another car. Shayne began to run again.

He was sure that the messenger had the name of the package's sender written down somewhere in his paperwork. If not, then Shayne intended to talk to the young man's employers and find out if the name was in their records. They might not want to give it to him, but he thought he could persuade them . . . especially when he told them what had been inside the box.

Even hurrying down the sidewalk, dodging other pedestrians, Shayne's mind was working. And it was telling him that something was wrong. He took a closer look at the car that was the object of his haste, now only a few yards away, and he knew what the wrong something was. There was no lettering on the doors of the car, no sign at all that it was being used as part of a messenger service. There might be a legitimate reason for that, he thought.

And the whole messenger business might be a phony, too, as phony as the mock-bomb that had been used to "assassinate" him.

CATCHING UP TO THE YOUNG MAN SUDDENLY TOOK ON A new urgency to Shayne. Out of the corner of his eye, he saw the green light on the other side of the signal turn to yellow. He had only seconds now.

But he had reached the car and was hurrying out into the street behind it, coming up on the driver's side and rapping on the glass sharply, taking the uniformed man by surprise and making him jump nervously. Shayne saw him swallow, and then he was rolling down the window.

"What's wrong, Mr. Shayne?" he asked. "Some problem? You didn't have to follow me into the street because you forgot to tip me."

Shayne put his big hands on the door and leaned down closer to the window. "Who sent that package to me?" he demanded.

"What's the matter, wasn't there a return address on it?" the man wanted to know. "Surely you could tell by looking at what was inside where it came from."

Shayne gestured curtly toward the curb. The light in front of them had turned green by now, and he knew the drivers behind them would

get pretty impatient in a hurry. "Pull over," he told the messenger. "I need to talk to you. I want to know who sent that package."

The young man licked his lips and looked harried. "Really, Mr. Shayne, I've got other jobs to get to. I've got to be going —"

"Pull over," Shayne repeated, and there was no room for argument in his hard voice.

He was searching back through his memory, trying to recall if he had ever seen the young man before. Up in the office, Shayne hadn't paid much attention to the messenger, but now he took a good look at him. The uniformed man was quite young, no more than twenty-one or twenty-two, with stylishly-cut dark hair. Shayne took a closer look at the white shirt under the uniform and then glanced down at the man's feet in the floorboard. Whoever the man really was, he wouldn't have been able to afford either the shirt or the shoes on a messenger's salary.

The other drivers were beginning to honk now. The uniformed man was still fidgeting and stalling. Shayne reached through the window and took hold of that expensive shirt, pulling the man toward him. He let all the anger he was feeling come through in his voice.

"That was a damned ugly prank," he grated. "Now pull this heap over to the curb and tell me what the hell's going on."

His attention was on the man in the car for the most part, with a part of his brain keeping an eye on the other motorists, the ones behind them. He didn't notice the car parked on the opposite side of the street in the next block, didn't see it pull out smoothly from its parking place and glide toward him.

But he heard the squeal of brakes as it suddenly stopped beside him. Shayne started to spin around, knowing that he was in close quarters with no warning and not liking it at all. The two cars were facing in different directions, but there was only a yard or so between them, and Shayne was pinned neatly in that small space.

The door of the second car slammed open as Shayne started to turn around, catching him in the back painfully. He bit out a curse and tried to swivel his head so that he could at least see what was going on, but before he could do more than catch a flicker of movement, something hard and unyielding slammed into the back of his head.

SHAYNE STAGGERED, SLUMPING AGAINST THE FIRST CAR. The blow to the head had him seeing fireworks, and he felt himself starting to slip down the side of the car. He grabbed for something, anything, to hold himself up, but though his fingers brushed against the door handle, they didn't have the strength to latch onto it. His large, rangy frame dragged him down, and he fell to the asphalt of

Flagler Street, even as he heard curious outcries from the startled passersby on the sidewalk.

That wasn't all he heard. From somewhere over his head, he heard a woman's voice, saying sharply, "How could you let him catch you like that? You're going to ruin everything!"

"Let's just get the hell out of here, all right?" the young man who had masqueraded as a messenger snapped back. "See you back there."

Then there was another squealing of tires that seemed to surround him. In his dazed state, Shayne wasn't sure just what was going on, but he realized that he wasn't enclosed by metal anymore. He was lying on his back in the street with no cars around him now. But there was still plenty of confusion, with people yelling and horns honking and rapid footsteps coming toward him. He tried to open his eyes as a familiar voice cried out, "Oh, my God! *Michael!*"

Then the darkness closed in, which at the moment, was just what Shayne wanted.

II

HE WASN'T UNCONSCIOUS FOR LONG. SHAYNE KNEW THAT AS soon as awareness started creeping back into his brain. There was something soft under his head, and as fingers stroked his forehead gently, he realized it was Lucy's lap serving as his pillow.

Shayne opened his eyes and looked up to see her staring down at him worriedly. When she saw he was awake, she asked, "Are you all right, Michael? Do you want me to call an ambulance?" Her voice was husky with concern.

Shayne blinked and started to sit up slowly. He saw that they were on the sofa in the outer office. Pain shot through his skull for an instant as he straightened up and swung his feet down to the floor, but it passed and he said, "No, thanks, Angel. I'm all right."

"You're sure?"

"I've been knocked out enough times. There's no damage done." He prodded carefully at the back of his head with blunt fingers, wincing once, but he knew what he said was true. The blow had put him out for a few minutes, but that was all.

"What in the world happened?" Lucy asked. "I was just coming back down the street from the bank when I heard this uproar and looked over to see you lying in the middle of the street."

Shayne took a cigarette out and lit it, leaving his feet planted solidly on the floor for the moment. Nodding toward the inner office, he said, "There's a package in there on my desk. Go take a look at it, Angel."

Lucy did as he told her, coming back a few moments later with a puzzled frown on her pretty face. "I don't understand, Michael. Is that

supposed to be a joke?"

"I wish I knew." Shayne smoked in silence for a moment, his hand reaching up to tug at his earlobe as he thought. Then he went on, "That's what I was doing out in the street, trying to find out who sent me that thing."

He laid the events of the last half-hour out for her quickly, then stood up, testing his legs and finding them steady enough. Lucy asked, "Should I call the police and tell them what happened?"

Shayne shook his head. "Not just yet. I'd like a chance to get to the bottom of this myself. I don't mind jokes, but it's a little different when they start hitting me over the head. Get me Sgt. Kaufman down at Motor Vehicles on the phone, Angel."

He went into the inner office while Lucy picked up the phone and put the call in. When she told him Sgt. Kaufman was on the line a minute later, he scooped up his phone and said, "Mike Shayne here, Phil. Can you run down a license number for me?"

The answer was a grudging yes, accompanied by a lecture about using state agencies for private purposes, but when Shayne rattled off the number, Kaufman punched it into the computer and gave him the answer moments later. Shayne thanked him, promised to buy him a drink soon, and hung up. Somehow, he wasn't surprised at the information the call had turned up.

He had caught a glimpse of the license of the car that the ersatz messenger had been driving, enough to be fairly certain that he had the number right. And what Kaufman had told him matched up, as far as the make and model of the car went. The owner was what Shayne was interested in, though.

The car was registered to Oceanview Car Rentals, with an address in Miami Beach.

SHAYNE LOOKED THAT ONE UP AND MADE THE CALL HIMSELF, identifying himself and asking to speak to the manager or owner. The girl who answered the phone told him to wait, and a few seconds later, a man came on the line.

"This is Mike Shayne," the big detective said. "I was wondering if you could tell me who rented one of your cars if I gave you the license number?"

The man's voice lost some of its initial politeness. He said, "I'm afraid that's against our policy, Mr. Shyane. I'm aware that you're a private detective and that you must have a good reason for asking —"

"Damn right I do," Shayne cut in. "The car was used in a crime this afternoon. I was knocked out and damn near run over. I'm about to report this to the cops, but I just thought I'd give you some advance

warning. I'm sure they'll be around to ask you the same questions I'm asking you now. So I'll find out, sooner or later. You can make it a lot simpler by telling me now."

"Well . . . Seeing as how the car was used in a crime, which is a definite violation of our rules, I don't suppose it would hurt to tell you. Give me the license number."

Shayne recited it and waited again, but when the man came back, he had what Shayne wanted. "That car was rented yesterday by a man named Charles Toomey. He gave his local address as the Palm House Motel, here in Miami Beach."

"Got it," Shayne said. "I owe you one."

"Please, Mr. Shayne, you'll emphasize to the police that we had nothing to do with whatever Mr. Toomey used the car for?"

"Sure," Shayne promised. "Don't worry about the cops."

He hung up and walked into the outer office, where Lucy was sitting at her desk and watching him. He had to grin at the expression on her face.

"Honest, I'm all right, Angel. There's no need for you to worry."

"I'd still feel better if you went to a doctor and had your head checked out. Getting knocked out is serious business."

"I know it is," he agreed. "And I'll have it checked out when I get a chance. But right now I want to know why somebody named Charles Toomey, who I've never heard of, would want to give me a fake bomb. If he's a practical joker, he's not very good at it; he didn't even stick around to see my reaction."

"I suppose you're going to see this Toomey now."

Shayne hooked his hat off the rack. "That's right. I don't know when I'll be back. Depends on how quick he wants to tell me what he's up to."

He felt considerably better as he settled his hat on his head and left the office, going down to the basement garage and picking up his Buick. The effects of the blow on the head seemed to have worn off rapidly, and Shayne knew how lucky he was. There had been plenty of times when he had come back to consciousness when it hadn't been so pleasant.

IT WAS A BRIGHT, WARM DAY, AND THERE WERE SAILBOATS on Biscayne Bay as Shayne drove over it on one of the causeways. He enjoyed seeing the brightly-colored sails, full of wind and driving their vessels through the water smoothly. It would have been nice to be out there with them, he thought, but not while he had a puzzle like this one on his mind. There was no way of knowing yet just how sinister the situation was, but Shayne knew something had to be going on. The

fake bomb and the clout on the head were proof of that.

The Palm House Motel wasn't one of the luxurious waterfront establishments, but it was only a block or so from the water, and Shayne knew it did a good business, catering to guests who couldn't afford the top-of-the-line hotels but still had money to spend on their Miami Beach vacation. Shayne pulled over to the curb next to the entrance to the parking lot, then suddenly gave the Buick gas and sent it on down the street. He had been scanning the parking lot as he pulled up, and a stroke of luck had come his way.

The man who had worn the messenger's uniform was emerging from one of the rooms about halfway down the complex. There was a woman with him, too, Shayne had seen in the brief glance before he pulled away and cruised on down the street.

They had been wearing beach clothes, which told Shayne what to do next. He found another parking place a little over a block away, then twisted in his seat and watched the two of them walk away from the motel, toward the beach. As his gaze followed them, they crossed the busy boulevard paralleling the beach at a red light, then disappeared from Shayne's view onto the sand.

He swung the Buick around in a U-turn and went slowly toward the beach. When he got to the boulevard, he could see them again. The man was wearing only trunks, but the girl had on a beach jacket, which she took off a moment later, revealing a splendid body in a bright red bikini. She shook out her long blond hair and followed the man toward the water.

It took Shayne a couple of minutes to find a good observation point, in a public parking lot for beach visitors. But he had a good view then of the couple, and as he watched, he saw them join several other young people. Shayne wished he could take out the binoculars in the glove compartment and study the situation more closely, but that would have been a little too conspicuous in the middle of the afternoon, he thought. He just kept his eyes on Mr. Charles Toomey and his lovely blond lady.

There seemed to be four couples in all, Toomey, the blond, and three other couples. All eight of them appeared to be young and attractive, like most of the other people on the beach. It was busy this afternoon, full of students on spring vacations, Shayne knew from the articles that ran in the paper every year at this time. Things were usually calmer here in Miami Beach than in Fort Lauderdale and the other places where the college students congregated, but it was still an important week for the local tourist industry.

Shayne wondered if Toomey and his friends could be vacationing students. If they were, then Toomey and his girlfriend were spending their vacation time in a strange way, pretending to blow up a local

private eye and then hitting him over the head. That didn't sound like normal behavior for college students, even ones down here for a week of sun and fun.

Lighting a cigarette, Shayne settled back in the front seat of the Buick. He couldn't very well go charging out there on the beach and get tough with Toomey, not with all the other people around. For the moment, it would be best to just keep an eye on him and try to find out what he was up to that way.

That plan could make for a long afternoon, though, Shayne knew. He was prepared to put up with it anyway.

That was exactly what he did.

As far as he could tell, from what he saw over the next couple of hours, Toomey and the others were behaving perfectly normally. They swam, they threw a frisbee back and forth, they joined a volleyball game organized by some of the other people on the beach. They were about as innocent-appearing a group as Shayne had seen for a long time.

BY LATE AFTERNOON, HE WAS TIRED, FRUSTRATED, AND beginning to wonder if the whole thing had been just some kind of collegiate prank. But then Toomey, the girl, and the others gathered up their towels and other beach gear and started walking back toward the motel. Shayne slid down in the seat so that they wouldn't see him and let them go. He knew where to find them.

He gave them a few minutes to reach the motel and get back into their rooms. Then he started the Buick, drove back to the motel, and made a quick jog through the parking lot, looking at the cars.

Sure enough, he saw the one that Toomey had gotten away in that afternoon. The license number matched, and Shayne recognized the car. He hadn't gotten a good look at the other car, so he couldn't tell if it was parked here in the lot, too, but he would have been willing to bet that it was. Just as he would have been willing to bet that it had been the blond girl who had knocked him out.

It looked like a confrontation with Toomey was the only way Shayne was going to find out anything. He knew which room Toomey and the girl had come out of earlier, and he assumed that they were sharing it. He parked back on the street and started to get out, ready to go face up to Toomey and demand to know what was the idea of the fake bomb.

He changed his mind when he saw the girl come out of the room, dressed now and looking just as stunning. The dress she had on was simple, but it was the way she wore it that made it effective. Shayne watched her go to three other rooms, knock on the doors, and talk briefly with the people who answered her knocks. Shayne stayed where

he was. Toomey, or the man Shayne was assuming to be Toomey, came out of the room, too, and met her on the parking lot; before Shayne had a chance to do anything, the other couples were coming out, too. Shayne had a good idea what they were going to do next.

There was a restaurant in the main building of the motel, and a fairly good one, from what Shayne had heard, though he had never eaten there. That was where the four couples were headed, and Shayne let them get inside before he followed. He had to eat dinner sometime, and this was as good a time and place as any, under the circumstances.

THE LIGHTING INSIDE WAS DIM, FOR WHICH SHAYNE WAS thankful. He spotted the group of eight, seated around a large table to one side of the room, and a ten dollar bill slipped to the headwaiter assured Shayne of being seated where he wanted to be — in a booth that backed up to a dividing wall which rose only part of the way to the ceiling. On the other side of that wall was the table around which the young people were sitting.

Shayne ordered a glass of Martell before dinner and sipped gratefully at the smooth cognac when the waiter brought it. He was much more concerned with what was happening on the other side of the dark wood wall. He could only make out snatches of conversation, but what he heard sounded innocuous enough. It was only when a voice that he recognized declared, "I'd like to propose a toast," that he leaned toward the wall, listening intently.

"A toast," the voice of the messenger went on, "to all of us, and to the game." Toomey was speaking more loudly now, but still only Shayne was in a position to eavesdrop on the group. "We've done very well so far," Toomey went on, "with two successful assassinations in two attempts! Let's drink to the game!"

"Shouldn't we drink to the victims?" a female voice asked, and Shayne knew where he had heard it before, too. "After all, there are no assassins without victims!"

Shayne's fingers clenched on his glass. He had heard enough. He stood up, still carrying his Martell, and stepped around the partition. He raised the glass and said sharply to the group, who were all staring at this big redheaded newcomer, "Why don't you all drink to the Miami Beach jail: That's where you're going to be very soon!"

III

THEY ALL STARED AT HIM, GAPING IN SURPRISE. TOOMEY and the blonde recovered first. Toomey sputtered, "M-Mr. Shayne! What are you doing here?"

"Tracking you down," Shayne grated. He tossed off the rest of his Martell and put the glass down on their table. "I didn't think your little joke this afternoon was too funny. In fact, I think I'll go tell the cops about it, right now."

The blonde stood up, reaching out with slim fingers and grasping Shayne's arm. "Please don't do that, Mr. Shayne," she pleaded. "We can explain."

One of the other young men said, "You're Mike Shayne, the private eye, aren't you?"

"That's right." Shayne looked at Toomey, then the girl, his gaze cold and intense. He could see the tightness of their faces, the lines etched there by worry. The girl still had hold of his arm, clutching at him desperately. "All right," he said abruptly. "I'll listen to what you've got to say, anyway."

Relief swept over Toomey's face. He said, "Move over, you guys. Let Mr. Shayne sit down."

The other couples slid their chairs around, and Toomey grabbed a chair from another table for Shayne. He put it down next to the blonde's chair, and Shayne sat.

Toomey said nervously, "Let me get you another drink." He started to motion to the waiter.

"Not just yet," Shayne told him. "Before I have a drink with you, I want to know what the hell is going on."

"It's just a game, Mr. Shayne," the girl said. "It's called Assassination. I swear it's all in fun."

"That fake bomb wasn't much fun. Spill it, Toomey. You *are* Charles Toomey, aren't you?"

"Of course. I'm Charles Toomey, and this is Lily Morton." The blonde turned a dazzling smile on Shayne while Toomey went on, "These are friends of ours. Marty Sterling, Alicia Cramer, Karen McCall, Ted Donohue, Jack Franklin, and Sandy Temple. We're all on our spring vacation down here."

The other young people were nodding and muttering greetings to Shayne as Toomey introduced them. They were obviously worried by the things Shayne had said and his anger toward them. Shayne glanced around at them and thought that they looked like nice normal college kids. His theory had been right about that much, anyway. He grunted, "Hello," at the group, then said to Toomey, "Now what's this about a game?"

"Like Lily said, it's called Assassination," Toomey answered quickly. "It's a variation on the murder game that was popular on college campuses a couple of years ago. In that game, the players were divided into two groups, killers and victims, and they took turns

pretending to knock each other off. In this game, though, the players are all killers, and they're assigned a specific person not in the game to serve as their victim. It increases the risk that way, you see. But it's all harmless fun, Mr. Shayne. Nobody really gets hurt."

"That's right, Mr. Shayne," one of the other young men put in. "Honestly, Charlie's little bomb didn't hurt you, did it?"

"It didn't hurt me," Shayne agreed. "But what if I'd been an older man with a weak heart? Having that thing go off might have scared me right into a coronary."

"That's a little far-fetched, don't you think?" Lily asked.

"Maybe so, but it's not impossible."

Toomey shook his head. "We only pick victims who are in good physical shape. You see, I thought about heart attacks, too. We're very careful, Mr. Shayne."

Shayne took out a cigarette and lit it. "What about your other victims? Who are they?"

One of the other girls said, "Ted and I were assigned Will Gentry. He's the police chief in —"

"Mr. Shayne knows who Will Gentry is," Toomey interrupted. "They've been friends for a long time. You see, Mr. Shayne, my friends are all from up north, where I go to school, but I'm from Miami Beach. Lived here all my life, in fact, until I left for college several years ago. So I know all about you."

"Then you know I like answers to my questions," Shayne said. "Who besides Gentry is supposed to be a victim?"

Toomey replied, "The other two are Gary Pierce, the city councilman, and my mother, Mina Toomey."

"Your mother?" Shayne was incredulous.

"You see, I know she can take a joke." Toomey's smile had a hint of mockery in it. The fact that Shayne hadn't immediately called the police but had agreed to listen to their explanation must have convinced Toomey that they were out of danger from the big private detective.

He was wrong.

SHAYNE FELT THE ANGER COMING UP INSIDE HIM AGAIN, and he said, "Pretending to kill somebody is a pretty sick joke. Which of the other victims have you already gotten? You said earlier that there had already been two of these fake assassinations."

"Marty and Alicia got Gary Pierce this afternoon, too," Toomey said. "They, ah, sabotaged his car and had the steering go out on one of the causeways. All pretend, of course."

Shayne figured he was telling the truth about that much, anyway. If

anything had happened to Pierce, he would have heard about it. He sat silently for a moment, glaring around the table, and Lily Morton put her hand on his arm again. "Please, Mr. Shayne," she said. "You're not going to try to get us in trouble, are you?"

Shayne ran a thumb along his rugged jawline in thought, then said, "There's one more thing I want to know, and it's the most important of all." He looked into Lily's blue eyes. "Why the devil did you knock me out this afternoon? Dammit, that's assault."

Her gaze fell, and she started to shift uneasily in her seat. "I didn't mean to hurt you," she said miserably. "I was backing up Charlie, and when I saw you come running after him, I guess I just got scared. I thought maybe he could talk his way out of it, but then I saw how determined you were." Her eyes came up then and met Shayne's. "Please, Mr. Shayne, forgive me. I just lost my head. I was afraid we'd get caught and that you wouldn't understand. It looks like I turned out to be right, after all. But I just drove up beside you and hit you with a flashlight that was in the car. I just wanted to get you away from Charlie long enough for us to get away. I didn't mean to hurt you, honest."

She sounded sincere. Shayne let another uncomfortable moment go by, then said, "No real harm done. But it was no thanks to you I could have gotten run over out there in the street."

"Listen, Mr. Shayne," Toomey said, "we'll do whatever you say to make this up to you. But, please, don't press charges against Lily." His concern for his girlfriend was obvious.

Shayne looked around at them again, saw the same expression of contriteness and concern on all their faces. He said, "All right, I won't call the cops — " Smiles broke out around him. " — but you've got to agree to one condition."

"Anything," Lily said breathlessly.

"Forget about this game. Just give it up and enjoy the rest of your vacation here in Miami Beach in the normal ways."

They all nodded. "You can bet we'll do just that," Toomey promised.

"I'd better not hear about you pulling stunts like this anywhere else, either," Shayne went on. "You may think it's just a game, but if you keep it up, somebody's liable to get killed sometime. I wouldn't like that at all."

"We'll be good," Lily said.

Shayne shook his head. "Just which one of you came up with such a crazy idea in the first place?"

There were shrugs around the table. Lily said, "I . . . I don't really remember. It just sort of . . . developed on its own. Murder games

have been popular for several years, and we just sort of came up with this variation."

Shayne stood up. "Put your creativity to better use," he advised them. He was still mad, but he was starting to think that these kids had learned their lesson.

"Why don't you stay and have dinner with us, Mr. Shayne?" Toomey asked. "It's on me."

"Yeah," one of the other girls said. "Charlie's family is rich. That's how we were able to afford to come down here, because Charlie's such a great guy."

"No thanks," Shayne said dryly. "Go on with your dinner. And I hope we *don't* see each other again."

He turned and stalked off through the restaurant, paying for his drink as he left. He had decided to forgive the kids, but he sure as hell didn't feel like socializing with them. Right at the moment, he was thinking more of going by Lucy Hamilton's apartment and filling her in on what had been behind the events of the afternoon.

SHAYNE CROSSED BISCAYNE BAY TO MIAMI AGAIN AND turned his Buick south, in the direction of his Second Avenue apartment. He decided to go by there first and change his clothes. Maybe Lucy would want to go out to dinner with him. He had a bit of a bad taste in his mouth from his encounter with the college students, and an evening on the town with Lucy might be just what he needed to get rid of it.

He left his car parked on the street and went up to his second floor apartment, tossing his hat down and loosening his tie as he came into his living room. Picking up the phone, he dialed Lucy's number as he lit another cigarette.

When she answered, he said, "It's me, Angel. How about having dinner with me?"

"What did you find out about this afternoon, Michael?" she asked. "I've been wondering about you . . ."

"I'm fine. And the whole business didn't really amount to much. I'll give you the whole story over a steak, okay?"

"Of course. I'm looking forward to it."

"I'll pick you up in a half-hour or so, then."

Lucy agreed, so Shayne said his goodbyes and hung up. He had time to grab a quick shower, so he started toward the bathroom, stripping off his coat and starting on the buttons of his shirt.

When he came out of his bedroom fifteen minutes later, he had showered and shaved and was buttoning up a fresh shirt. He crossed the room to the liquor cabinet and poured a couple of inches of Martell into a heavy tumbler, then carried the drink over to the window.

Pushing the curtain back, he looked out at a lovely Miami evening, and he was looking forward to spending the rest of it with Lucy. He already felt a hundred percent better.

A bullet punched through the glass, shattering it and sending splinters flying into Shayne's face.

HE FLUNG HIMSELF TO THE SIDE AND DOWN, ROLLING across the floor when he landed. When he neared the door, he surged to his feet and one long arm shot out. He slapped the light switch by the door, plunging the living room of the apartment into darkness.

Shayne dropped again, keeping low. His pulse was racing. There were little stinging pains all over his face from the flying glass, but he knew that none of it had gotten into his eyes, which was his main concern at the moment. His reactions had been fast enough for him to get his eyes closed when the window shattered, and the fact that he had been raising the glass of cognac to his lips had helped, too. His hand had shielded his face to a certain extent.

The cognac was soaking into the carpet now, where Shayne had dropped it, but that didn't concern him. His hand searched in the darkness for a moment before it fell on the table where his telephone sat. There was a drawer in the table, and in that drawer was a pistol. Shayne kept it loaded. There had been trouble here in this apartment before.

Clutching the gun tightly, he went across the room in a crouching run to the window. Flicking the curtain back with his free hand, he was ready to fire with the other one.

But there was nothing to fire at. Everything on the street two floors below looked normal, as did the buildings across the street. There had been no more shots after the first one. Shayne stood still there beside the window for what seemed like an eternity but was probably around five minutes. Then he took a deep breath and admitted to himself that the sniper was probably gone.

He left the lights off and groped for the phone. The darkness didn't bother him as he called Lucy's number again. He was careful to keep his voice level and unconcerned as she answered and he said, "Me again, Angel. I won't be able to make that date after all. Something's come up."

"Trouble, Michael?"

"Just some business."

"Which always means trouble. Be careful, Michael, and call me whenever you get a chance."

"There's just no fooling you, is there?" Shayne grinned in the shadows. "I'll get back to you when I can, Angel." He hung up and finished dressing in the dark.

It could be that there had been something the college kids hadn't told him. He wasn't working on any major cases at the moment, certainly nothing that would prompt anybody to take a shot at him. He was going back to the Palm House Motel, find those kids, and ask some more questions.

One thing was for sure. The bullet that had shattered his window was real.

There was nothing phony about *this* assassination attempt.

THE PALM HOUSE MOTEL LOOKED FAIRLY QUIET AND PEACEFUL as Shayne pulled up to it a little later. He turned into the parking lot this time and drove directly to a space near the room that he had seen Toomey and Lily emerge from earlier. They were the spark behind this assassination game, despite what had been said about it seeming to evolve naturally. Shayne felt confident of that much.

There was no light showing in the windows of the room. He glanced at his watch; it was early, much too early for Toomey and Lily to have gone to bed for the night. It could be that they were out on the town with the other young people. Shayne got out of his car and strode over to the door, raising his hand and rapping sharply on the panel with his bony knuckles.

There was no response from inside. Shayne waited, listening intently, but no sound came to his ears through the door. He knocked again, with the same lack of response.

Shayne's fingers went to the ring of keys he carried in his pocket, and he jingled them slightly as he thought. There was a good chance that one of the keys would open the door, and if they wouldn't . . . well, he had been known to pick a lock or two in his time. But there were people coming and going around the motel, and lights burned in most of the windows. If he had had something more concrete to go on, he would have taken the chance and broken in, but as it was, he had only a hunch, and one that wasn't strong enough to play at the moment. He turned away from the door and went back to the Buick.

There was a phone booth by the curb next to the motel. Shayne stopped beside it and got out long enough to look up a listing in the directory. Someone listed as "M. Toomey" lived in the fashionable suburb of Bal Harbour. Shayne remembered the comment about Toomey's family being rich, and he remembered Toomey giving his mother's name as Mina. There was a better than even chance that this M. Toomey was the same one.

SHAYNE POINTED THE BUICK NORTH. IT DIDN'T TAKE LONG to reach Bal Harbour, and he was familiar enough with the streets to

find the address he wanted with no difficulty. The house was large and sat back off the road behind an extensive, well-cared-for lawn. Shayne turned into the driveway that led up beside the house.

He saw lights burning on both floors of the house. He had considered calling ahead but had decided against it. If Charles Toomey and Lily Morton were indeed here, Shayne wanted his arrival to come as a surprise to them.

A flower-bordered walk led from the driveway to the front door. Shayne strode up to the porch quickly and pressed a blunt finger against the lighted doorbell button. He could hear chimes ringing faintly somewhere inside.

Perhaps a minute went by before a voice said, "Yes, what can I do for you?" It was female, and coming from a small speaker next to the door, concealed so artfully in an ornately-carved wooden panel that Shayne hadn't even noticed it until the woman spoke.

He assumed the microphone was with the speaker, so he said, "I'd like to speak to Mrs. Mina Toomey, please. My name is Mike Shayne."

"And your business, Mr. Shayne?"

"Actually, it concerns her son, Charles. I'd like to speak to him, too, if he's here."

There was silence from the speaker for long seconds, then the door abruptly opened without warning. It only went back a few inches, though, before a chain stopped it. The same voice that had come over the speaker said through the crack, "Are you a policeman Mr. Shayne?"

He reached for his wallet and said, "No, I'm a private investigator. I'll show you my license, if you like."

"No, I recognize you now." The door closed just as Shayne caught a glimpse of an eye looking out at him, then he heard the rattle of the chain being unfastened. A second later, the door opened wide.

A woman in her sixties stood there, wearing slacks and a silk blouse. Her hair was predominantly grey, with white starting to show up. But her face looked younger than her years, and she stood tall and erect. She said, "I am Mina Toomey. Charles isn't here, but I'll be glad to help you if I can. Won't you come in?"

Shayne followed her through a foyer with thick carpet on the floor, into an elegantly-furnished living room that looked like it was seldom used. There was no denying the quality of the furniture, though, or its expensiveness. There were original oil paintings on the walls. Mrs. Toomey gestured at a sofa and said, "Won't you sit down Mr. Shayne?"

He wasn't sure about the ability of the frail-looking sofa to support his rangy frame, so he sank onto it carefully. It was probably an

antique, and he didn't want to break it. Mrs. Toomey went on to offer him a drink, but he shook his head to that.

"Actually, Mrs. Toomey," he said. "I'm looking for your son. Have you seen him tonight?"

She frowned at him as she sat down in a spindly armchair. "Seen him?" she asked. "I didn't even know he was back in Miami."

"You didn't know he was down here on his college's spring vacation?"

She shook her head. "I'm afraid my son and I don't keep in as close contact as we should. He calls me occasionally, and I mail his checks to him, but other than that . . ."

Shayne considered that, holding his hat on his knees and feeling uneasy. He said, "What made you think I was a policeman, Mrs. Toomey? Is it common for the cops to ask you about Charles?"

He thought she might be offended by that question, but he wanted to know the answer anyway. If she did find it offensive, she didn't show it as she answered, "You looked like some sort of authority. But Charles has been in trouble in the past. I suspect he may be again." Her voice was cold, almost emotionless.

"It's possible," Shayne admitted. "I'm looking for him in connection with a case I'm working on." That might be stretching the truth a little, but not much. It was true he didn't have a client, but he sure as hell didn't intend to let someone shoot at him and not investigate it. "Charles may not be involved, but he could well be. I just saw him an hour or so ago. He's staying at a motel in Miami Beach."

"With some coed from school, I imagine." The disapproval in Mrs. Toomey's tones was evident now.

Shayne let that comment pass. He had wondered why Toomey had chosen to stay in a motel when he had a home in the Miami area, but he thought he understood a little better now. There had probably been plenty of clashes between mother and son, and Shayne would have guessed that they had been about women, for the most part. He said, "You said that Charles had been in trouble before. Do you mind telling me what for?"

"Nothing major. Possession of drugs, public intoxication, disturbing the peace." She put her hands on her knees, clasping them together primly. "I'm afraid Charles has always been a problem child, despite his high degree of intelligence."

It was a pattern Shayne had seen before. A kid with a high IQ and lots of money, bored with a life where everything came easy and out to find something to provide a little excitement. The type who wound up causing more trouble than his money could handle. He was generalizing, Shayne knew, but he had seen enough similar cases to know that

it was fairly common.

Mina Toomey leaned forward slightly. "What has he done now, Mr. Shayne? If there's anything I can do to help . . ."

"I don't know that he's done anything, Mrs. Toomey," Shayne told her frankly. "But he and some of his friends from school are down here pulling pranks on their vacation, and I put a monkey wrench in their plans. A little later, someone took a shot at me. Whoever it was meant to kill me."

He expected that to shock her, and it did. One of her hands went to her mouth involuntarily as she gasped. "And you think Charles — Oh, no! He wouldn't do that!"

"Like I said, he may not have," Shayne said quickly. "But the fact of the shooting remains, and the fact that I had trouble with him earlier in the day."

"Do the police know about this?"

"Not yet. I've been holding off on telling them while I did some investigating myself. But I may have to tell them, if I don't get some answers soon. If you do see Charles or talk to him, tell him it's important that I get in touch with him. Would you do that?"

"Of course. I'll tell him right away, if I can." Her face did indeed look older now, closer to her years. She went on softly, "I just can't believe it of Charles. I know he's been a problem ever since his father died . . . My husband died when Charles was only a boy, Mr. Shayne. That made it hard on all of us."

"I'm sure it did," Shayne said, standing up. "I'll be going now, Mrs. Toomey. I'm sorry I've had to worry you like this, when it may not have anything to do with your son. It has to be checked out, though."

"Certainly." She stood up. "I'll see you out . . ."

"Thanks, but I can find my way. Good night."

Shayne left her standing there in her unused living room.

HE HEADED BACK TO MIAMI BEACH, PLANNING TO GO BY THE motel once more and see if Toomey and Lily had returned from wherever they had been earlier. It was still a mystery to him why Toomey would risk a murder charge, a *real* murder charge, by shooting at him, but his conversation with Mina Toomey had done nothing to eliminate her son as Shayne's prime suspect.

There was still no light in the motel room window when Shayne arrived. He muttered a curse under his breath and got out of the Buick. After coming back here, he wasn't going to leave without at least knocking again.

He rapped twice, waited, rapped again. Nothing from inside. Shayne rubbed his jaw tiredly, feeling the beard stubble rasp under his

fingers, then started to turn away.

Something stopped him.

It was a sound, a sound coming from inside the motel room. Shayne swung back around, listening intently. It was almost like a low moan....

His hand shot out and rattled the doorknob. It was locked. The sound came again, and this time, Shayne was sure it was a moan. He didn't waste time with the skeleton keys or a picklock. Instead, he leaned back, raised one of his big feet, and drove it against the door as hard as he could.

It took two kicks, but the door jamb splintered on the second one and the door popped open. Shayne was through it in an instant, his hand darting under his coat and coming out with his pistol even as he charged into the room. He crouched, snapping the gun from side to side as his eyes scanned the room.

Most of it was in shadows, but enough light came in from outside, through the windows and the now-open door, for Shayne to see the form sprawled on the bed.

Lily Morton was lying limply on the mattress, her clothes torn and blood on her face.

SHAYNE FOUND THE LIGHT SWITCH NEXT TO THE DOOR AND flipped it up. Illumination didn't make the scene look any better. The room was a mess, chairs overturned and items scattered all over the floor. Plenty of violence had taken place in this room.

And one of the victims was Lily Morton. Shayne crossed the room with three long strides, kicked the bathroom door open, and checked it. There was no one else in the room. Shayne swung around and went to the bed, holstering his gun and kneeling beside Lily. Her chest was rising and falling rapidly, and she uttered a moan from time to time, like the ones that had brought him into the room. He found the pulse in her throat. It was strong. The blood on her face came from a deep scratch on her forehead. Her hair was a lush blond tangle above the crimson.

As Shayne leaned over her, her eyes suddenly flickered open. She stared up at him for a moment, uncomprehending, then her mouth gaped in a cream and she started to sit up convulsively. Shayne grabbed her shoulders and held her down, then clapped a hand over her mouth, cutting off the scream. He barked, "Easy! It's Mike Shayne! I'm not going to hurt you, Lily! I'm not going to hurt you."

He felt the shudder that ran through her, but he could see a hint of reason returning to her face now. She must have been terrified, coming to after what had obviously been a hell of a struggle, only to find a man she might not have recognized right away bending over her. Shayne

took his hand away, and Lily gulped air, deep and raggedly.

"M-Mr. Shayne!" she gasped. "I . . . I was so scared —"

"I know," Shayne said gently. "What happened here, Lily?"

"It . . . it was terrible! We had just gotten back, and before Charlie could close the door, two men forced their way in behind us. They knocked me down, and Charlie started to fight them, and then they hit him! I tried to get up, but then they hit me again, and Charlie couldn't get up, either . . . He asked them what they wanted, he offered them all his money . . ." The words were coming quickly, in bunches. Shayne kept his grip on her shoulders and let her tell it the way she wanted to. "They hit him and knocked him down again, knocked him out, I guess, and then they laughed. One of them said . . . One of them said they'd get all his money, all right. They'd get all the money, or Charlie's mother would get him back . . . in pieces!"

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CLOSE TO AN HOUR HAD PASSED SINCE SHAYNE DISCOVERED Lily Morton in the hotel room. The police were still there, but so far, Miami Beach Chief Peter Painter's men had found nothing that would help in locating Charles Toomey and his captors. The kidnappers didn't appear to have left anything behind, and fingerprints were no good, considering how many people handled things in a motel room.

Lily was sitting on the bed, pale but composed. Shayne sat across the room in one of the motel's chairs, smoking and thinking while the police technicians went about their jobs. Paramedics had checked Lily over and told her that she was all right, but that she should get a more complete examination by a doctor as soon as possible. They had bandaged the scratch on her forehead, the white of the dressing standing out against the tanned skin.

Mina Toomey had been notified of her son's kidnapping. Shayne understood from the lieutenant in charge of the case that she had been understandably upset, but rational enough to report to the cops that no ransom demand had been made. One would be forthcoming, though, Shayne was sure of that.

Several officers were questioning the other guests at the motel even now, Shayne knew, including the other college students, but he doubted that it would do any good. Still, the legwork had to be done. He just had a feeling that in this case, it wouldn't help.

Lieutenant Wright spoke in low tones to one of his men, then turned and came over to Shayne. Shayne knew the lieutenant slightly, well enough to know that Wright was neutral on the subject of big red-headed private eyes, something that couldn't be said about his boss, Peter Painter. Painter and Shayne had clashed many times over the

years, and Shayne was glad that Wright was handling the case at the moment.

The lieutenant looked down at Shayne and said, "That's about all we can do here, Mike. Any other suggestions?"

Shayne shook his head bleakly. "Are you going to put a man in at the Toomey house?"

"Mrs. Toomey won't let us," Wright answered. "She's scared, says that she's afraid the kidnappers may be watching her. She doesn't want us to scare them off. I am going to get a tap on her phone, though. She's agreed to that much."

Nodding his head, Shayne tugged at his ear and said, "I guess this ties in with the shot at me earlier."

"I'd say so. The kidnappers were watching Toomey, and they recognized you. Naturally, they didn't want you anywhere around when the snatch came off, so they tried to either kill you or scare you off. Guess they don't know you very well." Shayne grunted noncommittally, and Wright went on, "We're through here. I can leave a man on duty outside, though, if Ms. Morton would like that." He turned his head to get Lily's reaction to the suggestion.

She nodded shakily. "I'd like that very much. Is it all right if I straighten my things up now?"

"Sure, go right ahead," Wright told her. "We appreciate you leaving everything like it was for us."

Shayne stood up as Wright and the other cops headed for the door. Wright paused before going out and pitched his voice low to say to Shayne, "You think she's going to be all right?"

"The medics said she was okay. As far as getting over the scare, that may take a while." Shayne's eyes met Wright's and he went on, "Let me know if you hear anything, all right?"

"Just as long as you reciprocate. Good night, Shayne."

Shayne closed the door behind the cops and turned to see Lily beginning to pick up some of the things that had been strewn around on the floor. He went over to help her, bending to scoop up an armload of books.

He set them down on the dresser and said, "You must be a dedicated student, to bring textbooks along on a vacation." All of the books were texts, he saw as he scanned the titles, ranging from drama to medicine to state law.

Lily shrugged. "I don't like to get too far behind in my work. I'd rather be ahead if I can. College is hard enough at best. And besides, I want to be able to get a good job when I graduate. Charlie and I will need —" She caught herself and broke the words off. Shayne thought

he knew what she had started to say, though. She and Toomey had probably planned to get married after they finished school, and with Mrs. Toomey opposed to such a match, they would need every advantage they could possibly get.

That had been a chancy future to start with. Now, it was even more so. Now, it all depended on the kidnappers . . .

Shayne helped Lily clean up the room, then he said his goodbyes and headed back toward his own apartment. He thought she hadn't really wanted him to go, that she had still been terrified, but the sight of the cop on guard just outside her door had calmed her fears.

It had been a long day, Shayne reflected as he arrived at his apartment, had a drink and fixed a quick sandwich to replace the dinner he hadn't gotten around to, and then climbed into bed. He hoped that he would go to sleep quickly, but it didn't happen that way. Instead, his head kept replaying everything that had occurred since Toomey, in his disguise as a messenger, had delivered the fake bomb. It may have been phony, Shayne reflected, but it had set off quite a few fireworks, anyway.

It was late, very late, when Shayne's eyes suddenly widened and he sat up in bed. He stared at nothingness for a long moment, then murmured, "It could be. It just could be . . ."

He would know in the morning.

LUCY HAMILTON PUT HER HAND OVER THE RECEIVER OF THE phone as Shayne came into the office and said, "It's a Mrs. Mina Toomey, Michael. Do you want to talk to her?"

"In my office," he nodded to her. "And as soon as you can, I want you to make some calls for me." He told her to call the county courthouse in a certain county in another state, then went on into his office without even taking off his hat and grabbed the phone up.

"This is Mike Shayne, Mrs. Toomey," he said. "What can I do for you?"

"You can come to see me, Mr. Shayne," Mina Toomey replied. "I want to hire you to help the police find my son."

"Certainly. I wanted to come see you again, anyway. I guess there hasn't been any ransom demand yet?"

"No. I've had no word at all, and I'm about to go out of my mind. Can you come right over?"

"I'll be there in twenty minutes," Shayne said.

He was as good as his word. Lucy had his other call waiting, but it didn't take Shayne long to find out what he wanted to know. Then he drove to Bal Harbour, eager now to talk to Mrs. Toomey.

And to warn her.

He parked at the same place he had the night before, and again, Mina Toomey answered his knock herself. She looked haggard from the strain, but she was well-dressed in a blouse and long skirt and was making an obvious effort to remain calm and composed. She had a cup of coffee in her hand, and as Shayne went into the living room with her, she asked, "Would you like some coffee, Mr. Shayne?"

He said, "Sure. Thank you," but his gaze was on the lovely blond woman who was sitting on a sofa.

"Mr. Shayne," Lily Morton said. "What are you doing here?"

"I could ask you the same question," Shayne said coolly.

"Miss Morton came over to wait here with me for any word of Charles," Mrs. Toomey said stiffly. Shayne could tell that she didn't like the idea, but she didn't want to throw Lily out, either. "She even made the coffee for me."

"Nice of you," Shayne said to Lily. "I'm here to ask a few questions that might help solve this case."

"Mr. Shayne is working for me now," Mrs. Toomey added.

Something flared in Lily's eyes. "I suppose you can afford high-priced private detectives," she said curtly. "You have plenty of money at your disposal, after all."

Mina Toomey's voice was beginning to drip ice as she answered, "If you're talking about the money that Charles's father left in trust for him, then you must know that I'm taking good care of it. Charles will have quite a nice sum coming to him when he reaches twenty-five."

"If he reaches twenty-five," Lily said. "Look, Mrs. Toomey, I don't want to argue with you, not at a time like this and not in front of Mr. Shayne, but you really shouldn't have tried to keep Charlie under your thumb. You should have just admitted that the two of you didn't get along and not punished him for it. You intimidated him, though, kept him too scared to stand up to you."

The anger in Lily's voice was coming through plainly. Shayne took a deep breath and asked, "What's your major, Lily?"

She looked at him like he had suddenly grown a second head, and he supposed that the question did take her by surprise. She said, "I'm majoring in Drama. Why is that important at a time like this?"

"Then Charlie was the pre-law student, right?"

"Right. But how did you —"

"I saw the textbooks, remember?" Shayne swung toward Mrs. Toomey. "I think I have a good idea what happened to your son, Mrs. Toomey. Why don't you sit down?"

Mina Toomey paled at his request. The still-full cup of coffee rattled in its saucer. She sat down on one of the antique chairs. At the same time, Lily's nervousness got the better of her, and she got up to pace

over to where a silver coffee service sat on a credenza. Shayne watched her for a second, then said softly to Mrs. Toomey, "I'm afraid there's a very good chance your son is dead."

Mrs. Toomey swallowed painfully, her face growing more gaunt by the second. She shook her head. "No, that can't be," she murmured, "He can't be dead, he just can't be."

Shayne was aware of Lily standing at his elbow. She had another cup of coffee, offering it to him. "I think you said you wanted some coffee," she said tonelessly, shocked by his statement.

Shayne saw movement out of the corner of his eye and jerked his head around to see Mrs. Toomey lifting her cup jerkily to her lips, ready to take a sip of the hot liquid in an attempt to calm her shattered nerves.

Shayne's hand lashed out and knocked the cup from her hand, spilling the coffee on the thick carpet. Mrs. Toomey cried out in surprise.

He put his own cup down carefully on a low table, then whirled toward Lily. She was plunging back across the room, reaching for her purse, which was sitting beside the sofa . . .

Shayne started toward her.

He was too late.

She reached the purse, delved inside it, and came back up with a pistol clutched tightly in her slim fingers. She leveled it at Shayne and cried, "Stop!"

SHAYNE DID AS SHE ORDERED. HE COULD SEE THAT THE GUN was cocked and the safety off. He took a deep breath as Mrs. Toomey babbled questions behind him.

He interrupted her by saying, "Mrs. Toomey, meet Mrs. Toomey. Lily is your daughter-in-law."

"But how — She couldn't be —"

"Yes, she is," Shayne said coldly, watching Lily intently. There was a fierceness on the girl's face now which robbed it of its beauty. Now, she looked like nothing else so much as a cornered animal.

"You are just too damned smart, Shayne," she grated.

"And you're an amateur," Shayne said scornfully. "You left too many tracks, Lily. Your marriage to Charles Toomey is a matter of public record in the county where you go to college. You think nobody would have suspected you when Toomey and his mother turned up dead, leaving all the money to you?"

Lily shook her head. "That's not the way it was supposed to be! You've got it all wrong!"

"I don't think so. Who came up with the first plan, you or Toomey?"

I'm talking about the one to fake his kidnapping and collect a good chunk of money that way."

"Charlie wanted his money, it wasn't hers to sit on that way. I don't care if his father did leave it in a trust —"

Shayne cut in, "It went beyond that pretty quick, though, didn't it? The two of you decided to murder Mrs. Toomey. You set up that stupid assassination game as a cover, in case you got caught in an unsuccessful attempt. But you had to make the game look real to the others, so you went ahead with a couple of mock-assassinations to set the stage. Including mine. Then when it came time for Mrs. Toomey to be a victim in the game, you'd switch what the others thought was fake poison for the real thing." He shook his head. "When Charles changed his mind, though, and tried to back out of the whole thing, you saw another way. The two of you had secretly gotten married, so if both he and his mother were to die, everything would go to you."

Lily's face was tight with hatred. "He had no right to change his mind!" she blazed. "Not after all of our planning, not even after you found out about the game and got him scared. I'm pregnant, Shayne, and Charlie had no right to change his mind after he got me that way!"

Shayne had seen a slight tremor of the gun barrel as emotion gripped her, and he asked relentlessly, "You weren't going to let him get away with that, were you?"

"Damned right I wasn't! He should have known better. But he didn't, and it was no trouble to use some of the poison on him. He didn't even know he was drinking it. We went for a walk by the ocean afterwards, and it wasn't until the last minute that he realized something was wrong. He tried to fight me, but he was too weak. It was dark, and nobody saw us . . . I pushed his body off the dock we were on. If the police don't find it, I'll have to give them a hint someday . . ." The barrel had drooped an inch or so as she spoke, reliving the murder of her husband, but before Shayne could take advantage of the opportunity, she jerked the gun back up and snapped, "Pick up your coffee and drink part of it, Shayne. Then give the rest to Mrs. Toomey."

Shayne laughed. "I don't think so. If you want us dead, you're going to have to shoot us. And that would look really bad, wouldn't it? You'd never get the money that way. Just me by myself, like it was last night when you took a shot at me, that was a different story. I've got plenty of enemies. Nobody would suspect I was killed over some dumb college prank. And then I'd be out of your way, so that I couldn't ruin your plan . . . which is just what I've done, isn't it?"

Lily's face was cracking now as Shayne hammered away at her.

"I just never should have found out who was behind the game, should I?" Shayne said. "I should have laughed it off. But I didn't."

And now you'll be going to jail for murder — ”

“Damn you!” Lily screamed.

Shayne was diving forward, sweeping an arm around and knocking her hand up as she squeezed the trigger convulsively. The gun blasted, sending a slug slamming into the ceiling. Shayne's fist whipped up, catching Lily on the point of her pretty chin. He heard her teeth click together.

Then she was dropping the gun and slumping against him limply. She was quite an actress, Shayne had discovered, but she wasn't acting now. She was out cold.

He lowered her to the floor and scooped up the gun, then looked over his shoulder at Mina Toomey. She didn't look like she had moved since Shayne had first told her that her son was dead. But now she stared down at Lily's sprawled body and said, “It's all true, isn't it, Mr. Shayne? What you said about Charles and . . . and this girl?”

“It's true,” Shayne said. “She wouldn't have tried to kill us if it wasn't.”

Mina Toomey clicked her tongue against her teeth and shook her head. “It's awful. She and Charles married, with a child on the way . . . It's just awful.”

“Yeah,” Shayne said. A lot of things were awful.

He found the phone and called the cops.

MIKE SHAYNE MYSTERY MAKERS

PAUL BISHOP (*The Samaritan*) tells us:

I am a five year veteran of the Los Angeles Police Department currently assigned to Juvenile Investigations out of West Valley Division. I have been collecting mystery fiction for almost twenty years with emphasis in the hardboiled and high adventure fields. I have hosted a mystery talk show on public radio called **THE PERFECT CRIME** and have been writing seriously for about two years.

*Killing someone's mother was bad enough. To do it
on Mother's Day was adding insult to injury!*

TO MOM, WITHOUT LOVE

by MEL D. AMES

SHE WAS MURDERED ON MOTHER'S DAY.

They were seated at the long table in the dining room, all eight of them, with mother Julia Endicott at the head. A festive occasion, with flowers, and candelabra, and champagne in long-stemmed glasses. The entire family was there; mother, of course, three sons and a daughter, and three more, kindred by marriage. Karl, the eldest, had risen to his feet, and was in the process of offering up a toast "on this propitious day" to all the mothers of the world, and his own in particular, when a muffled explosion echoed like distant thunder down the length of the table.

Seven pairs of eyes turned as one to see mother Endicott's gentle face flare in sudden, exquisite agony. And as they sat rooted to their chairs, the tortured features turned grimly pale, then slowly and silently slumped, as in an old silent movie, descending squarely into her plate of roast prime rib and Yorkshire pudding, with a dull unpalatable plop.

No one moved. Karl remained on his feet in stunned immobility. It was Elsa, Karl's wife, who finally pushed back her chair and went to the woman's side. "She's dead," she said, after a brief examination. "She's been shot. Someone had better call the police."

DETECTIVE-LIEUTENANT CATHY CARRUTHERS STOOD AT HER office window in Metro Central's Eleventh Precinct, a superb silhouette against the blood red sky of a dying day. Beyond the window, lights were winking on in the deepening crimson dusk and slow-moving streams of traffic had already begun the ritual daily blood-letting from the city's heart. She looked to be deep in thought.

"A penny for your dreams, Lieutenant."

She started, then turned with a wry smile as Detective-Sergeant Mark Swanson's imposing frame filled the open doorway.

"Wouldn't *thoughts* be more precise?"

Mark Swanson shrugged his heavy shoulders. "Who wants precise?" he said. "I live and breathe precise." His ruggedly handsome features took on a distant look. "It's dreams, Lieutenant, that can turn a man into a lion — a woman into a tigress." He growled softly.

The Lieutenant chuckled as she took the chair behind her desk. "Enough already," she protested. "Lions and tigers make lousy detectives. So do dreamers." She tilted her beautiful blonde head. "What's on the agenda?"

Mark dumped his husky carcass into a chair with a disparaging grunt, leveling a wistful eye at his senior partner. Six magnificent feet of honey-haired female could be a monumental distraction at the best of times, but working under "the Amazon," as she was known to her burly colleagues in Homicide, for the better part of a year, had been a bucket of mixed blessings for Mark, and an exercise in manly frustrations. His good-natured verbal passes (and her mild rebukes) had lately become routine. A thinly-veiled attempt, perhaps, to self-censor the deep bond of respect and mutual affection that had grown between them.

"There's been a killing," Mark began, "out in Thornston Heights. You know the area, *Mortgage Hill*, where Metro's elite live. A guy by the name of Karl DeVries phoned it in. He claims someone shot his mother."

The Lieutenant arched a flawless eyebrow. "His *mother*? Mark, isn't this Mother's Day?"

"Right on, Lieutenant. Sunday. May 9th."

"*Tch, tch* — Well, so much for mother-love." She hooked an unruly lock of spun gold from her forehead with an elegantly curled middle-finger. "Suspects?"

"Seven. All family. They were having dinner at the time."

"Then we know who did it?"

Mark shook his head as he raked a wooden match across the sole of his shoe and touched the flame to a cigarette. "No one saw a thing."

"Nothing?"

"Nothing."

"Hmm." The Lieutenant seemed to see something of interest on the ceiling. "That's a bit unusual. Still, matricides of this type are not normally too complicated. The silent seven will probably turn out to be one murderer and six reluctant witnesses. Everything being equal, Mark, I'd guess a quick wrap-up on this one."

Mark drew heavily on the cigarette. "You can forget the everything-being-equal, Lieutenant. This guy DeVries is a psychiatrist, his wife is his nurse. He said they made a cursory check of the victim before he phoned. She'd been shot, all right, but the only wound they could find was in the abdomen."

"So?"

"It was an *exit* wound."

"So? Again."

"There was no *entry* wound."

"That's not possible, Mark. What came out must have gone in. Somewhere."

"Yeah, well — it's got DeVries flipping through his own ink blots."

The Lieutenant placed the tips of her fingers and thumbs together, pressed them to her lips and closed her eyes. She almost looked to be praying. Mark knew better. *Preying*, he thought, might be more to the point. "Mark," she said at last, "unless bullets have started making U turns, we might just have a puzzler on our hands."

Mark gave her a knowing grin. The Amazon, he knew, was in her element. There was nothing that intrigued her more than a "puzzler."

"I've already alerted the meat squad," Mark said, pushing himself out of the chair. "They'll be there ahead of us. And there was a black-and-white in the neighborhood, Lieutenant. Fisk and Mayhew. I gave them instructions to get individual statements from the seven suspects, and to keep them on the premises, under escort. They're all related, one way or another, to the victim, Julia Endicott."

"Endicott? I thought you said the man's name was DeVries."

"I did, and it is. DeVries is apparently Julia Endicott's son from a former marriage. And apart from his wife, Elsa, each of the other six is either an Endicott, or married to one. Same mother, different father."

"I see." The Lieutenant humored him with a doubtful smile. "We'll sort that out later." She rose from the chair, smoothed the creases from her snug gray skirt, slipped a matching jacket over a form-fitting white shirt-blouse. (much to Mark's disappointment) and shouldered a well-worn red leather purse.

"Let's go," she said, as she made for the door. "Let's find out just

what kind of person would actually kill his own mother — on Mother's Day."

THE ENDICOTT HOME TYPIFIED THE OLD-WORLD AFFLUENCE of Thornston Heights. It was an ancient rambling colonial on half an acre of extravagant landscaping. Lawns were vast and green, flower beds rife with color, and a mingling of stately pines and poplars embraced the brooding old house with a somber, verdant dignity. A rank of white pillars stood guard at the entrance and dark-lidded dormers, like armed loopholes, seemed to defend a way of life that was already history. There were a dozen vehicles in the parking lot, six of them police cars, when Mark and Lieutenant Carruthers pulled up in an unmarked Chevy.

"We're not exactly the early birds, are we?"

Mark, with a sly grin, was quick to point out that birds did not make any better detectives than lions or tigers. The Lieutenant winced. "Touche," she said. And a moment later, she had slipped out of the car and was headed off across the gravel toward the house. Mark caught up quickly, coasting into step beside her.

They climbed wide stone steps to a kind of portico, where a black uniformed officer, the size of Too Tall Jones, stood stoically before the door. He directed them across a large entrance hall, through a lavishly furnished lounge, and into a dining room that still smelled pleasantly of food. The candelabra continued to burn brightly over the table but what was left of the champagne had all but given up its last bubble. The tragic figure of Julia Endicott was still firmly ensconced in her half-eaten dinner.

Sam Morton, Chief Medical Examiner for Metro Central, looked up from the body as they entered.

"Ah, Lieutenant. Glad you're here. I've been waiting to get this lady onto a stretcher."

"Have the camera crew done their thing, Sam?"

"Just finished."

The Lieutenant's vivid blue eyes turned grimly cold as she methodically surveyed the scene of the crime. Were it not for the missing dinner guests, the shooting could have taken place but a moment before. Chairs were pushed back from the table; as though in a kind of panic, and uneaten portions of roast beef and pudding had been left to cool on the plates. Someone, the Lieutenant noted, had already chalked the outline of the body and its relative position to the table, the chair, and the floor.

"Okay," she said, "but do it carefully. I don't want anything disturbed. And Sam, I'd like a preliminary as soon as possible."

"No problem, Lieutenant. I can give it to you now, but I don't think you're going to like it."

"Oh?"

"Well, for starters, she's been shot."

"That's very astute, Sam."

Sam Morton grinned good-naturedly. "This lady's been shot, Lieutenant, from the inside — out."

"Can you be more explicit?"

"The body has only one wound that I can see. It's in the abdomen. And it's an exit wound."

"Come on, Sam. If a bullet did an exit through her stomach, it must have entered somewhere."

"Tell me more, Lieutenant."

The Amazon acknowledged his sarcasm with a lopsided smile.

"What about the body's natural orifices?"

"Not likely."

"But you're not certain."

"That's right, Lieutenant, I'm not. This is a prelim, remember? The 'I'm-certain' will have to wait until after the autopsy."

"Was there more than one bullet?"

"I doubt it."

"Has anyone found the one there was?"

"Not to my knowledge."

"Anything else you can tell me, Sam?"

"Not really — except, judging from the hole it made coming out, I wouldn't think there'd be much of the bullet left to find."

"That's encouraging."

With the aid of an assistant, Sam Morton moved the lifeless mother Endicott from her seat of honor at the table to a waiting stretcher. They were about to wheel it away when the Lieutenant leaned over the body, peering closely at the grisly wound.

"Just a moment, Sam. What are these little black flecks in the wound?"

"Your guess is as good as mine, Lieutenant. Maybe she put too much pepper on her roast beef. *Jeeez*, let me do my job, will you? I'll write you a whole book about it, later. Much later. Yeah — I'll call it the Autopsy Report, by Samuel Morton, M.D., and I'll personally see that you get a free autographed copy, *sometime tomorrow*. Now will you *please* let me get the hell outta here?"

THE LIEUTENANT WATCHED HIM GO WITH A WIDE GRIN. SHE turned to Mark who had stopped to inspect the wood behind the blood-spattered table cloth.

"Find anything?"

Mark opened a pen knife and dug gingerly at the polished wood. "Just a few lead fragments, Lieutenant. Very soft lead. Scattered. Hardly penetrated the varnish." He dropped his gaze and his hands to the carpet beneath the table's edge, combing the thick pile with his fingers. "There's a few fragments down here, too."

The Lieutenant examined a piece of the soft metal. "I want this whole table area gone over thoroughly by the Lab team," she said to Mark, "with particular attention given to the underside of the table. Regardless of *how* it was done, we must assume that this woman *was* shot. And whoever shot her was apparently sitting at this table. Since no one saw it happen, we can only conclude that the gun was fired from below the table, out of sight of the others."

"Gotcha." Mark was quick to pick up her train of thought. "A paraffin scan under the table would not only tell us if a gun was fired, but where it was fired from. All we'd have to do then, would be to find out *who* was sitting *where* at the table. And if the suspects were tested as well, a positive match-up on one of them would give us a pretty tight case. Maybe you were right, Lieutenant, about a quick wrap-up, I mean."

"We should be so lucky."

Mark's enthusiasm quickly ebbed. "You don't think we'd have a case?"

"It's all too easy, Mark." The Lieutenant was slowly circling the long table. "Too pat, somehow. Besides, we still don't know how that bullet (or whatever it was), managed to come bursting out of the lady's stomach when it had no obvious way of getting in."

"Any ideas?"

"Well — one possible solution might be a bullet that had been rigged to explode on impact. The explosion at the skin's surface could conceivably give the *illusion* of an exit wound, even if, in fact, it was not."

"Yeah." Mark brightened. "It might at that. But will Sam be able to pick that up in the autopsy?"

"I don't see why not."

"Then we'll just have to wait for the autopsy report." Mark grinned, remembering Sam's parting edict. " — sometime tomorrow."

"Not necessarily, Mark." The Lieutenant was standing behind the chair at the foot of the table, looking down its cluttered length. "If an impact slug was used, and only one shot was fired, there would have to be not one but *two* reports. One, when the bullet left the gun; the other, when it exploded on impact. And with six witnesses —"

"Of course." Mark thumped his head with the heel of his hand.

"Lieutenant, you never cease to amaze me. Mind you, DeVries never mentioned hearing two reports, but then he didn't mention hearing only one, either. Maybe it's time we started asking a few questions."

The Lieutenant turned as the friendly black giant entered the room with a precautionary duck of his head. The Lab crew came trailing in behind him.

"Officer, where'd you stash the seven suspects?"

"In the library, Lieutenant. The door at the end of the front hall." He pointed behind him. "Officers Fisk and Mayhew are in there now, taking statements."

"Thank you." The Lieutenant returned the officer's easy smile with one of her own, then watched him duck out of the room and head back to his post at the front entrance.

"He's a tall one," she said to Mark. "What's his name?"

"Bones."

"As in Jones?"

"Uh-huh. George Washington Bones."

"What do they call him?"

"Too Tall."

The Lieutenant looked heavenward as though in search of help. "I'm sorry I asked."

One of the men from the Lab team detached himself from the group. "Anything special on this one, Lieutenant?"

"Mark, here, will clue you in, officer. And Mark, you might have them drop off a sample of the lead you found to Ballistics. I've never known a slug fragment to be so pliable. When you're through, I'll be in the library."

"You got it, Lieutenant."

As she turned to go, all eyes went with her, like a well-trained drill team. They followed her engaging back through the dining room door and across the vast carpeted floor of the lounge, metering her long-legged loping stride with awe and approbation. When she reached the door to the hall, those same eyes suddenly jerked wide in shock.

"*Stop him!*"

The frantic shout had come from the direction of the library. Too late. A man came hurtling through the doorway like a bull out of a loading chute. Taken by surprise, the Lieutenant was dumped roughly to one side, momentarily staggered. The intruder had run clear into the center of the lounge before he spotted Mark and the Lab team. He was cut off. He had obviously tried to detour around Too Tall Bones, whose massive frame was literally obliterating the front entrance. But now, with escape thwarted a second time, he swung quickly around and headed back the way he had come. A flushed and shaken Cathy

Carruthers apparently did not strike him as being much of a threat.

That was his mistake.

This time, the Amazon saw him coming. In one unbroken, fluid movement, she hiked up her snug gray skirt, well past the midway mark of her long thighs, and swung to face him (which in itself, Mark thought later, should have been enough to stop any man) and with the reptilian grace of a striking cobra, she drove a nylon-clad knee fiercely into the man's stomach. He collapsed in pain and nausea. But before he could hit the floor, the Amazon had spun around, her golden mane flying, and with one hand at his collar, the other at the seat of his pants, she blithely picked him up and started down the hall with him, toward the library. The man's feet were churning thin air a good foot above the floor.

"I don't believe it," said one of the Lab men.

"I don't believe *them*," said another.

"Hey, Swanson," a third man said to Mark, "where do you get the brownie points to play in the same sandbox with that carnivorous kitten?"

Mark eyed the man grimly. "First off," he said, in a soft menacing voice, "you gotta be able to shift a motor-mouth outta high gear, and into neutral."

The Lab team went quietly to work on the table.

WHEN MARK CAUGHT UP WITH THE LIEUTENANT, SHE WAS standing in front of a red tile fireplace in the library, with policewoman Fisk at one elbow, and officer Mayhew at the other. They spoke in low voices, comparing notes, while the other seven people in the room sat quietly waiting. Book shelves lined all four walls with only a high narrow window here and there, and the door, to break the continuum of hoarded knowledge. An occasional moan drifted up from a deep leather chair where the would-be escapee was slouched low, nursing his stomach.

"You, then, are James Endicott," the Lieutenant said to the moan.

When it failed to answer, officer Fisk said, "That's him, Lieutenant. He answers to Jimmy — at times."

"What made him bolt out of here?"

The officer shrugged her shoulders. "He just didn't like being detained, I guess. He said he had a heavy date. He's the youngest of three sons, Lieutenant. Twenty-six. Not married. And not terribly broken up, it seems, at the death of his mother."

"Occupation?"

"He's a gentleman of, uh — leisure." Officer Fisk's soft brown eyes looked almost apologetic. "He told me he subsists on an allowance

from his father's estate. He would not divulge the amount."

The Lieutenant looked at the young man in question with mild disfavor. "Gentleman, you say."

"Lieutenant?"

An untidy looking man who appeared to be in his early forties, stood up as he spoke. He was dressed in a tweed jacket, with leather elbows, and a badly trimmed full beard. A curved pipe drooped congenitally from a protruding lower lip. There was a patronizing manner about him that he was given to flaunt like a badge of merit. This man, Mark guessed, bearing all the usual sad pretensions of the academic milieu, would no doubt be the psychiatrist.

"I'm Karl DeVries," the man unwittingly confirmed. "This is my wife, Elsa."

The woman who had now risen to his side, was forbiddingly austere in a shapeless black dress. Her hair was straight, without fullness or color, and her thin sharp face gave her the look of a gaunt wingless bird.

"Do we not have your statement?" the Lieutenant asked the psychiatrist.

"Yes, you do. Officer Mayhew took it, but —"

"But what?"

"Well, Elsa and I examined the wound, Lieutenant, before I made the phone call, and there just isn't any way it could have happened —"

"But it did happen," the Lieutenant said curtly.

"Yes, well — perhaps you could tell me if you've found out *how*, or *who* — I mean, there was only one —"

The Lieutenant bristled. "I do not intend to discuss the complicacies of this case with you, sir, nor the progress of our investigation. You are a suspect, Mr. DeVries, nothing more. Now please sit down."

"Doctor," DeVries said, obviously miffed at being so abruptly dismissed.

"Eh?"

"*Doctor* DeVries," the man insisted.

The Lieutenant regarded him coolly, then left him with an irreverent "Hmph" as she turned her attention back to officer Fisk's notebook. "Now, which of you is Julia Endicott's daughter?" she asked the room at large.

A woman about thirty, with long flowing auburn hair and a pleasant round face, raised her hand. "I am, Lieutenant. I'm Susan Endicott — I mean, Cross." She giggled nervously at her own confusion. "I've been an Endicott for thirty years, and a Cross for one. I guess I'm just not used to it yet." She looked sheepishly at the man beside her. "This is my husband, Brian."

Brian Cross had an affable, easy way about him. He was younger than his wife, deeply tanned, with boyish good looks and a shock of blonde hair that had been bleached almost white by the sun. He returned her embarrassed look with an understanding smile and reached for her hand.

"What is your occupation, Mr. Cross?"

"I'm, uh — between jobs, Lieutenant."

"What did you do previously?"

"He's a competitor," Mrs. Cross put in quickly, defensively. "He's a top ranking surfer. We've just come back from Hawaii where he placed —"

"Top ranking beach bum, you mean."

The unfriendly interruption had come from a man who could only be Herman J. Endicott (being the only unidentified man left) and, according to officer Mayhew's notes, a bank manager by profession. The woman at his side, the Lieutenant assumed, would be his wife, Cybil.

"What bank are you with, Mr. Endicott?"

"Metro Civic Savings," the man replied.

Herman J. Endicott not only *was* a banker, he looked like one. He had a huge pudgy body that was (at the moment, at least) humanely hidden from view beneath the folds of an expensive gray business suit, but three obscenely bloated chins still remained, unadorned, in the public domain. Sitting there, with his lard and his chins, and a pair of thick-rimmed spectacles perched on a dab-of-putty nose, he looked for all the world like a giant pink frog in mufti. His wife, Cybil, who obviously shared his table as well as his lily pad, was only slightly less obese than he.

"*Ribbit, ribbit —*"

The humiliating sound had come from somewhere in the vicinity of an angelic looking Brian Cross. Herman J. glowered at his handsome young brother-in-law who, in turn, politely acknowledged the glower with a nod and a smile. Susan Cross dug an elbow into her husband's ribs, then seemed to find something amusing in her lap.

"Please?"

Lieutenant Cathy Carruthers waited patiently until the room was silent. All eyes were on her. There were times, Mark mused, when his stunning partner truly put live meat on the bare bones of a mythical jungle legend. *The Amazon*. A goddess from another planet, he thought, could not have been more incredibly unique, more outrageously beautiful. She stood now with her feet braced firmly apart, hands on hips, chest high, her luminous blue eyes sweeping the room like an airport beacon.

"There are some questions," she told the gathering, "that I'd like to

ask you all in unison. Please think carefully before you attempt to answer." She looked to each waiting upturned face before she went on. "Now, was there anyone else, *anyone*, other than you seven, in or around the house at the time of Mrs. Endicott's death?"

The seven suspects shook their heads as if wired by a single string.

"Not a maid? A handyman? A housekeeper?"

"Not today, Lieutenant," Susan Cross volunteered. "There is a full time housekeeper, a Mrs. Griffith, but she was given the time off while the family was visiting. I helped my mother prepare and serve the dinner." She lowered her eyes, visibly saddened. "She wanted this to be a close family reunion."

"Then you all planned to spend the night?"

"Everyone," Herman J. put in, "but my wife and me. We live only a few blocks away, Lieutenant. Besides, we felt it would be crowding things a bit."

"Plenty of room," Jimmy muttered, having suddenly found his voice. "Couple of stuffed shirts, that's all."

The Lieutenant ignored the interruption. "Did any one of you see any kind of weapon — a gun, perhaps?"

The heads moved negatively for a second time.

"Does anyone *own* a gun?"

"Karl does," Jimmy piped in. "He's a real gun freak. He even makes his own bullets."

The Lieutenant turned to face the psychiatrist. "Is that true?"

"I certainly don't consider myself to be a freak, Lieutenant, but, yes, I do have an interest in guns."

"You make your own ammunition?"

"Yes. But what I choose to make myself, anyone over eighteen can purchase at will. I fail to see anything sinister, Lieutenant, in what has lately become a rather popular hobby."

"Murder," the Lieutenant noted quietly, "has also become rather popular of late." She swung her attention back to the group. "The shot," she asked them, "was it loud? Or faint? Muted? What did it sound like?"

"Faint," said Jimmy.

"Muted," said Herman J.

"Muffled," said Susan Cross. She looked at her husband for corroboration.

"Muffled," he agreed with an affable nod.

"Now think, before you answer this last question." The Lieutenant paused significantly. "Can any of you remember, *precisely*, how many shots were fired?"

"One," they answered in a chorus.

The Lieutenant's eyes flicked from one face to another. "You're sure of that?"

Jimmy Endicott put voice to their collective response. "One shot," he said unequivocally. The rest of them nodded.

"There goes our solid case," Mark muttered close against Lieutenant Carruthers' ear.

"So it would seem," she sighed. To the seven witnesses, she said, "That's all the questions for now, but I must ask that no one leave this house unless authorized." She disregarded Herman J.'s angry snort. "Guards will be posted to ensure that you comply. I must also ask that you cooperate with officers Fisk and Mayhew while they conduct an immediate search; first, of your persons, then this room, the dining room, the lounge and the kitchen, and the traveled areas between."

The Lieutenant spoke to Susan Cross. "Will you be able to accommodate your brother and his wife, Mrs. Cross?"

"Why, of course," she said. "This place has more bedrooms than the Metro Hilton."

"The rates aren't bad either," her husband quipped.

The Lieutenant smiled. You could not help but like this pair. To Mark, she said, "I guess it's back to square one for us."

"Yeah." Mark tagged along as she made for the door. "Got any more bright ideas?"

"Just one." She treated him to a win-some-lose-some look. "Let's grab a salami on rye. Maybe we'll detect better on a full stomach."

WHEN THE LIEUTENANT AND MARK RETURNED TO THE house on Thornston Hill, an hour and some twenty minutes later, they were met at the door by Too Tall Bones.

"Evening, Lieutenant. Sergeant."

Nodding, the Lieutenant hesitated. "Have you been relieved for a lunch break, officer?"

"No sweat, Lieutenant," the big man replied. He pointed to a brown paper sack just inside the door, big enough to hold a week's groceries. "My wife fixed me a lunch."

"Well, you'd better get at it," the Lieutenant said, with a wondering look at the bag. "You're only on shift for another four hours."

Once inside, they found the overnight guests wandering freely about the house. Officers Fisk and Mayhew were seated before the fireplace in the lounge, with their lunch pails open. As the Lieutenant and Mark approached, Mayhew was trying to talk the brown-eyed Fisk into swapping a turkey sandwich for one with jelly and peanut butter.

"Forget it, Mayhew," Fisk was saying, "you must think I'm stupid or something. I didn't burn my brains with my bra, you know —" Her

words trailed off into an embarrassed silence as she realized they were no longer alone.

The Lieutenant grinned. "Sorry to interrupt such an enlightened discussion, officers, but can I safely assume that you have completed the search I ordered?"

"All done, Lieutenant." Mayhew spoke with difficulty around a mouthful of jelly and peanut butter.

"Did you turn up a weapon of any kind?"

"No gun, no weapon of any kind — no nothing."

"Hmm — the further we get into this case, the more perplexing it seems to get. Just one dead-end after another." The Lieutenant chewed thoughtfully at her lower lip. "Well, let's try extending the search to their homes. We might just turn up a new lead."

"Tonight?" Officer Fisk looked dismayed. "There's three of them out there, Lieutenant, not counting Jimmy's quarters, upstairs."

"Two," Mayhew put in. "DeVries lives across the state line in Huntsville. Out of our jurisdiction."

"So now what do we do?" Fisk gulped the last of her turkey sandwich and washed it down with a tug at her thermos.

"You start by checking out young Endicott's rooms, upstairs, then pick up the other two. Herman J. and his wife live only a few blocks from here. The Cross's, if I remember correctly, are out in Beachville, close to the surfing."

"Whatta we do for search warrants?" Mayhew asked.

"You don't." The Lieutenant was looking a little exasperated. "You solicit their cooperation. And don't forget their keys."

"What if they refuse?"

"Just remind them that we can always do it the hard way — tomorrow morning. Why delay the inevitable?"

"And DeVries, Lieutenant. What about him?"

"Mark will handle it." She turned to him. "Get on the blower to Huntsville, Mark, and arrange a proxy search of the DeVries home. They'll need time to pick up a warrant, so you better get with it. And don't forget to fill them in on the case so they'll know what to look for."

"What *are* we looking for?" Fisk asked ingenuously.

The Lieutenant regarded the young brunette with measured patience. "We're looking for three of those five illusive Ws, officer Fisk. We already have the When and the Where. It's the What, Why and Who we're after now. Are there any more stupid questions?"

No one seemed inclined to risk her further displeasure by responding. It wasn't until the Lieutenant and Mark were half way across the room that officer Fisk found the courage to call after them. "Lieutenant?"

The big blonde detective halted abruptly and slowly turned, then stood, silent, watching the young policewoman apprehensively narrow the gap between them.

"I don't know if this is important," the officer said meekly, "but I found it in the kitchen during our search." She held out a blue plastic folder about the size of a large wallet, loosely wrapped in a paper napkin. It had a white label affixed to the front of it. "It's a prescription, Lieutenant. The label is made out to Julia Endicott."

The Lieutenant took the folder and read the label aloud. "Three capsules a day, before meals." She opened it. Both interior sides were lined with a series of small celluloid pockets, each about a half inch in diameter, and most of which still contained a deep red gelatin capsule.

"Very good, officer Fisk." The Lieutenant rewarded the young rookie with a smile. "This could prove helpful."

Officer Fisk beamed.

FOLLOWING HIS CALL TO HUNTSVILLE, MARK WENT TO FIND his senior partner. He found her in the library, seated at a small reading table. She had the plastic prescription folder before her, studying it closely. She looked up as he entered.

"Mark, have a look at this."

He drew a chair up beside her as she edged the folder and herself closer to him. He was not unhappy with the resulting shoulder-rubbing propinquity.

"You can see, Mark, how the prescribed capsules are arranged chronologically on each side of the folder. Three in each row (breakfast, lunch and dinner), seven rows on each side; in all, a two-week supply. And see how each row of three is dated." She pointed with a brightly lacquered, blood-red fingertip. "She apparently began taking them at breakfast on May 4th, here, which is the first date shown. Now, notice that all the celluloid pockets on this left side, are empty (May 4th through May 9th), except for the last row, dated May 10th. That means she took her medication, whatever it was, up to, and including, the one before her fateful last dinner."

Mark's face reflected the puzzling turn of his thoughts. "This is all very interesting, Lieutenant, but aren't we dealing with a shooting?"

"Indeed we are, Mark. But what if one of these capsules had contained an explosive of some kind?"

"Come again, Lieutenant. There just isn't any way that an explosive charge in a casing *that small*, could carry a detonating timer — or even some far-out kind of remote electrical impulse mechanism. It just is not physically possible."

"It isn't physically possible for a bee to fly, Mark, but it damn well does."

"Meaning?"

"Impossible is not one of my favorite words."

"I'll remember that," Mark confided meaningfully, "next time I get a couple of tickets to the ball park."

The slow unfolding of her wide grin at such close quarters, Mark decided, was tantamount to watching the parting of the Red Sea.

"Am I interrupting anything, Lieutenant?"

The two detectives drew apart like a couple of errant kids. Susan Cross stood in the doorway and there was a teasing, knowing twinkle in her eyes.

"No — of course not." This was the first time Mark had ever seen Cathy Carruthers in less than total control of her composure. "What can I do for you?"

"I'd like your permission to clean up the dining room, Lieutenant. Brian and Jimmy have offered to help."

"Yes, well — " The Lieutenant straightened authoritatively with a defiant toss of her honey-colored tresses. "I see no reason why you can't. As a matter of fact, I plan to use that room, hopefully sometime tomorrow, for a revelatory reenactment of the crime."

"We'll have it ready for you, Lieutenant." She turned and quickly left.

"Where were we?" Mark asked innocently.

"Where we've been since we took on this case," the Lieutenant replied in a brisk, back-to-business voice; "back at square one — where else?"

IT WAS THE FOLLOWING DAY, MONDAY, MAY 10TH. CATHY Carruthers sat nursing a cup of coffee at a table in Lil Oly's Cafeteria, one short block from the Eleventh Precinct. Her attention seemed to vacillate between the papers she had spread out over the table, and the entrance to the cafeteria. The noon lunch crowd had thinned to a few stragglers and she was beginning to show signs of mild exacerbation when Mark's husky frame suddenly filled the doorway. Her eyes brightened as she returned his friendly glance of recognition.

She watched with amusement as he headed directly for the coffee bar, while dogging tenaciously in his footsteps, a little man, taking three steps to Mark's one, followed close behind. She recognized at once the abbreviated Garfield Leprohn, Metro Central's shortest police officer, and the controversial head of the Records Department. Mark seemed to be totally unmindful of the little guy who struggled along in his wake, trying desperately to keep up, while balancing a cup of

coffee in one hand and a briefcase in the other. When finally they were seated at the Lieutenant's table, the *Leprechaun*, as he was known to his life-size colleagues at the precinct, sank back in his chair and breathed an audible sigh of relief.

"Whew!" he gasped. "I'm a little short on breath." He glanced at Mark, regretting at once his unhappy choice of words.

"What else is new?" Mark muttered dryly. He seemed incapable of resisting any opportunity to rub the little cop the wrong way.

The Lieutenant fought back a smile as she gathered up the scattered papers and fed them into two separate file folders. She then leveled her startling blue eyes at the *Leprechaun*.

"Thank you for coming, Garfield. What have you got for me?"

The Lieutenant's courtesy in calling him by his given name, instead of that ugly Irish epithet, was not lost on the Records man. "I've got a rundown on all the suspects, including DeVries," he said brightly, basking in the warmth of the Lieutenant's smile. "Would you like a summary?"

"Please."

Mark bristled while the little man made a Hollywood production out of opening his briefcase and extracting, one by irritating one, a number of manilla folders from its hidden recesses. Finally, Mark raised one curled fist in front of his eyes and rotated the other as though he was turning an old-fashioned movie camera. "Mummy's Little Helper Tells All," he announced in the servile tones of a Hollywood set director, "take one."

The *Leprechaun* flushed angrily. "All these people," he began between clenched teeth, "are without a police record of any kind. The Herman J. Endicotts are an integral part of Metro's exclusive upper crust. Socialites, of the first order. On the other hand, young Jimmy Endicott, and the Crosses, are only tolerated. The DeVries as you know, reside in Huntsville, where they keep pretty much to themselves."

The *Leprechaun* paused to take a sip of coffee. "Jimmy Endicott, in spite of his immaturity, is warmly embraced by his peers, and grudgingly respected by his elders. He was the favorite son, in every sense of the word."

"That doesn't seem to jibe with the uncaring way he reacted to his mother's death," Mark observed.

"That business back at the house, Mark, was most likely just a gut reaction," the Lieutenant replied. "Each one of us has to deal with grief in our own way."

"Yes, well — if Jimmy was the favorite son, then Susan was the favorite (if *only*) daughter." The *Leprechaun* plowed relentlessly on.

"And Brian Cross, her husband — well, he's just an out-and-out enigma. He graduated with honors in corporate law, but subsequently rejected numerous lucrative offers to stand before the bar. He did a voluntary stint in Nam, then gravitated to a wastrel's life with the sun-sand-and-sea set of southern California. About thirteen months ago, he met and married Susan Endicott. In short, this obviously talented young man, aided and abetted now by a coddled wife, has simply turned his back on success to become a beach bum."

"Hmm," the Lieutenant mused. "Perhaps one should stop to ponder the true definition of success, Garfield."

The Leprechaun chose not to respond. "DeVries is currently registered at Huntsville U.," he continued. "He's been there most of his adult life; first as a student, then as tenured faculty. He now enjoys his own practice while still affiliated with the University on an honorary basis. Quite a lucrative arrangement. And prior to their marriage some six years ago, his wife worked with a pharmaceutical firm. She is now his nurse and receptionist. The DeVries, by the way, are not much liked, apparently — by anyone."

Mark took out a cigarette and lit it. "All this seems to bear out the results (or lack of them) of the searches made by Fisk and Mayhew last night," he said. "They didn't turn up a damn thing, either. Mind you, we still don't have anything yet on the Huntsville call." He squinted thoughtfully at the Leprechaun. "What about the money angle?"

"The banker," replied the Leprechaun, referring to his endless heap of data, "is wealthy in his own right. The rest of them depend, with varying degrees, on Endicott money, voluntarily meted out by mother Endicott. I say Endicott money but it is (or *was*) DeVries money. Julia Endicott was a wealthy widow with one small son, Karl, when she met and married Walter J. Endicott. Endicott died of prostatic cancer about a year and a half ago, but Julia had never relinquished control of her first husband's money — until, of course yesterday. There is a will, which was only recently drawn up, leaving the entire estate to all her children equally —"

"There goes the money motive," Mark put in.

"— but it was never signed."

"Oh? Why not?"

"Well, that's what this Mother's Day dinner was all about. She was going to sign it in front of everyone."

"Interesting," the Lieutenant reflected, "but not very helpful. The more info we get, the less we seem to know."

"No hidden debts?" Mark probed hopefully.

"None that I could dig up."

Mark turned to his senior partner. "What about Lab, Lieutenant,

and Ballistics?"

"Another blank. The capsules contained a common medication for chronic osteoarthritis. There were no powder burns or residues under, over, or anywhere near the table, except, of course, directly in front of where Mrs. Endicott was sitting. All paraffin tests were negative. Can you believe it? *No one at that table fired a gun.*"

Mark blew a billowing cloud of smoke (with malice aforethought) directly toward the Leprechaun. "Maybe Sam Morton was right," Mark recalled. "Remember what he said, *This lady's been shot, Lieutenant, from the inside — out.*"

The Lieutenant gathered up her folders. "Yes, and anybody who makes a statement like that had better come up with some answers to back it up." She got to her feet. "Let's go find out what they are."

Before vacating his chair, Mark unleashed another billow of smoke at the Leprechaun. The little man coughed and reached for a cigarette of his own.

"Do you think that's wise?" Mark asked.

"Wise?"

"Cigarettes," Mark grinned, as he turned to leave, "can stunt your growth."

IT WAS AFTER THREE O'CLOCK WHEN MARK SWUNG THE unmarked Chevy out of the Metro Morgue parking lot. The lieutenant sat beside him, clutching her collection of folders in one hand while bracing herself against the dashboard with the other. "Now I know why they call this the suicide seat," she complained, as Mark made a taxi stop at the curb, then hung a ferris-wheel right out onto the main drag.

"Keep your shirt on, Lieutenant. We're not in orbit yet."

"Mark." The Lieutenant's voice was menacingly quiet. "I have no more intention of going into orbit with you than I have of removing my shirt. Now, slow this vehicle down to legal speed."

Mark decided it would be expedient to change the subject with the gears. "So what's the M.E. got to say?"

With a parting glance at the speedometer, the Lieutenant opened one of the files. "Hmm, what's this?"

"Looks like a will," Mark proffered with a quick sidelong glance.

"It is a will," the Lieutenant said as she leafed through the legal document, "and it is still unsigned. Now how in blazes did the Leprechaun know that, when it must have gone with the dead woman to the morgue?"

"You just can't sell that little guy short," Mark acknowledged with a wide grin.

The Lieutenant muttered something under her breath as she consulted the autopsy report. "Here's what was found in her stomach," she said after a short perusal, "or what was left of it: *one empty shell casing, .22 caliber, short — inch-long length of twisted wire (from the roast beef, do you suppose) — globules of partially dissolved gelatin — minute lead fragments — wide-spread cauterizing of tissue — powder residues —*"

Mark emitted a low whistle. "That lady sure had a belly full."

"Just what you might expect, Mark, if you can imagine a bullet being fired from *inside* someone's stomach. Oh, here's something else: *detonation in mid to lower sector of stomach — rupture of anterior and posterior wall — shell casing reversing through pancreas — lodged solidly against first lumbar vertebrae —*" The Lieutenant looked up quizzically. "What do you make of it, Mark?"

"Not a damn thing. You?"

"Well, for one thing, it proves, unequivocally, a bullet was fired from inside Julia Endicott's stomach."

"Uh-huh." Mark voiced his disbelief. "You said so yourself, Lieutenant — that just isn't possible."

"Precisely." The Amazon settled back with a smug, satisfied smile. "You see, Mark, when the 'impossible' becomes a *fait accompli*, the if is no longer in question — only the *how*."

Mark gave his beautiful partner a searching stare. "Know something, Lieutenant? You're weird."

ONCE AGAIN, EIGHT INVITED GUESTS SAT AROUND THE LONG table in the Endicott dining room. On this somber occasion, however, the candelabra had not been lit and there was no champagne in long-stemmed glasses. Detective-Lieutenant Cathy Carruthers now occupied the seat at the head of the table where mother Endicott had so abruptly and so mysteriously met her death less than twenty-four hours before.

In the background, Mark was making himself as inconspicuous as possible. Officer Fisk stood at the entrance to the kitchen, while Too Tall Bones hovered like a dark cloud just outside the open door to the lounge. Officer Mayhew had assumed the post at the front entrance. The time was precisely 5:35 p.m.

The Lieutenant surveyed the seven anxious faces that ringed the table with a cool candor. "You are all seated just as you were, last evening?"

There were seven assenting nods.

Elsa DeVries sat to the Lieutenant's left, with Susan Cross next, and then her husband, Brian. On the Lieutenant's right was Karl DeVries,

Herman J., and his wife, Cybil, in that order. Jimmy Endicott sat alone at the foot of the table. The mood of the group was one of suspense.

"The purpose of this get-together," the Lieutenant began, "is to ascertain precisely what happened last evening when Mrs. Julia Endicott —"

"Lieutenant?"

The Lieutenant looked up with some annoyance.

"Sorry to interrupt, Lieutenant." Too Tall Bones had thrust his great head through the doorway. "Phone call, from Huntsville. They say it's important."

"Thank you, officer." Rising, she said, "Excuse me," to those at the table, then left to make the call.

It was fully five minutes before she returned. All eyes were on her as she resumed her seat.

"A slight change in plans," she announced soberly. "A search of the DeVries' Huntsville home has now given us sufficient substantive evidence to make an arrest. Pardon me, a *joint* arrest." She turned to the bearded professor on her right. "Suppose you save us all a lot of time and speculation, Mr. DeVries, by telling us just how you armed that deadly capsule that took the life of your mother."

A look of horror clouded the face of everyone at the table. They turned fearful, questioning eyes on each other, grimly aware that a murderer sat among them. DeVries swallowed noisily. "What? Are you mad, Lieutenant? You don't know what you're saying —"

"Oh, but I do, Mr. DeVries. The Huntsville police have brought to light your frantic attempts to burn and otherwise destroy the materials that were used in the trial-and-error manufacture of that lethal capsule."

"I didn't agree to a search. Lieutenant, you had no right —"

"A duly processed warrant gave us the right, Mr. DeVries. Besides, you were careless in more ways than one." She drew the blue plastic prescription folder from an inside pocket of her jacket and held it out to him. "If you look carefully at the *inside* of the third empty celluloid pocket in the row of three, dated May 9th, you will see that the Lab has dusted for a credible thumb print. There just isn't any way a print could get there *after* the pocket had been sealed, or *resealed*, as the case may be. What possible reason, Mr. DeVries, can you give for having tampered with a sealed capsule in your mother's prescription folder, other than to rig it for detonation?"

"Oh, Karl —" Elsa DeVries was the color of chalk, her voice a filament of fear,

"Shut up, Elsa." DeVries, too, had paled under the scraggly beard. "What you say, Lieutenant, is absurd. Why, in heaven's name, would

I kill my own mother?"

"I can only answer that question by conjecture, Mr. DeVries." The other members of the family watched and listened in stunned silence. "I suggest that you were alienated from your mother the day she married Walter J. Endicott, years ago when you were still a child. Only the existence of your father's fortune could have persuaded you, over the years, to remain close to a mother you felt had sullied the memory of your father. You felt betrayed; her love for you diluted, and divided; first by the man she married, then successively by each child she bore him."

"Rubbish," DeVries was livid. "Utter nonsense."

"It was the proposed reading of your mother's will," the Lieutenant went on, "that finally fanned the long-smoldering hatred into a murderous flame. This was *your* money (or so you envisaged), left to *you*, in your mother's care. Now it was to be divided among the progeny of your mother's shame. The signing of the will, last night, was to have been a demonstration by Mrs. Endicott, of her impartial love and respect for each of you. But you, Mr. DeVries, did not see it quite that way."

"But how would Karl stand to gain by the death of my mother, Lieutenant?" Herman J. was visibly shaken.

"Not at all, monetarily. The ultimate disposition of the estate, which will now go to probate, will not (in my opinion) differ substantially from the provisions already proposed by your mother. But while the money was undoubtedly the catalyst, it was not the motive. Hatred, Mr. Endicott, *long-nurturing hatred*, can be eminently more obsessive and violent a motive than simple greed."

Elsa DeVries' hawk-like features suddenly slackened into a convoluted mask of fear and remorse. "Karl," she cried, "it's no use —"

The bearded academic glared heatedly at his distracted wife. "Damn you," he seethed. "Damn you all!" His eyes darted wildly about the table from one startled face to another. "Bastards. That's what you are. An illegitimate pack of thieving bastards. You have no more right to the DeVries fortune than you have to the name —" After a time, his anger subsided, slowly, into a subdued, breathless sobbing.

"Mrs. DeVries." The Lieutenant placed her hand gently on the woman's arm. "It was you, was it not, who procured the capsule blanks for your husband? Did he, perhaps, threaten you?"

"Yes." She hesitantly covered the Lieutenant's hand with one of her own, as though seeking a new ally in the face of her husband's anger. "He knew I had access to any number of them, all sizes, from the pharmaceutical firm where I used to work."

The Lieutenant's voice, when she spoke, was soothingly quiet. "Do you want to tell us about it?"

The distraught woman glanced apprehensively at her irate husband, wondering whether to proceed. In quick response, the Lieutenant caught the eye of Too Tall Bones. "Take this man into another room, officer. Cuff him and detain him, out of earshot."

The scraggly professor sprang to his feet. "You're not getting rid of me that easily," he fumed. "*You!*" He glared at his wife. "You're no better than the rest of them." He lunged across the table at her, but she cowered away from him like a frightened ostrich.

At that instant, the Amazon's left hand flashed out with the speed of lightning. She caught the one extended wrist closest to her in a grip of steel. She squeezed. As her knuckles whitened, the pallid face beneath the beard contorted with pain, and the struggling body slumped against the table, limp and helpless.

Moments later, Too Tall Bones was snapping on the cuffs while assessing his amazing colleague with wide, white eyes. "My, my —" he said, with undisguised awe and admiration. And with a puzzled, wondering, final glance at the Amazon, he yanked the disheveled academic to his feet and led him whimpering from the room.

"You were saying, Mrs. DeVries?"

As her husband withdrew, the veil of terror that had so quickly cloaked the beady, bird-like eyes, appeared now to lift. "What is it you want to know, lieutenant?"

The Lieutenant opened the prescription folder on the table and extracted a capsule. She held it up so that all could see it. "It was a capsule, then, identical to this, that a .22 caliber short round —"

"Two capsules, Lieutenant. One, slightly smaller than this, was telescoped into the other, to provide a more solid sheath."

"Then the bullet?"

"Not exactly. A conventional round would have been too long, and too heavy. Karl removed the heavy-lead slug and filled the cavity with a weightless cotton fluff, then capped it with a thin disk of a soft lead alloy. But before that, he had weakened the detonating cap by plying it with a kind of acid solution, softening the metal to a point where the slightest impact would set it off."

"Kind of like a hair trigger," the Lieutenant suggested. "The spoiled casings of those he had been experimenting with, were found in his workshop. But, tell me, Mrs. DeVries, how was it detonated?"

The other five people at the table teaned forward, straining to catch each tremulously spoken word.

"A small, tightly coiled spring, that had been shaped at one end to facilitate a firing pin was imbedded in the end of the capsule, in line

with the detonating cap. It was held there in a specially molded saddle of coated gelatin. This coating effect, Lieutenant, is achieved by treating common gelatin with a methanol solution, which causes it to harden and become less soluble when subjected to the gastric juices of the stomach. Variations of this process are widely used today in the manufacture of time-release medications."

"Yes, we're all familiar with them, but —"

"Yes, Lieutenant, I'm getting to it. The spring was secured in the coiled position by a keeper of *untreated* gelatin, leaving it vulnerable to the first eroding effects of the stomach fluids."

"Ah — now I see." The Lieutenant held the capsule curiously between thumb and forefinger. "The keeper was designed to dissolve first, while the balance of the capsule was essentially still intact. Then the spring, when released, would propel the firing pin forward, against the detonating cap, and — *zaaap!*"

She tossed the capsule lightly in her hand. "Ingenious, to say the least. The deep red color of the capsule would, of course, hide its contents. It would be a simple matter, then, to substitute the deadly capsule for any other in the prescription folder, and thereby predict the very time of death."

She hesitated a moment, her eyes narrowed in retrospection. "The *manner* of Mrs. Endicott's death, however, the so-called exit wound, was simply a matter of chance. Had the device been facing any other way but forward when it exploded, there probably would have been no exterior wound at all. Death, however, would have been just as swift, and just as permanent."

Elsa DeVries reacted with an agonizing moan. "He made me do it, Lieutenant. I didn't want to. I — I *loved* her —"

"Whatever."

The Lieutenant nodded to officer Fisk who came forward to escort the sobbing woman from the room. She turned to the others at the table. "That wraps it up," she said curtly. "You are all free to go."

Stunned and shaken by the bizarre turn of events, the five remaining Endicotts filed silently from the room. When only Mark remained, the Lieutenant said, "I hope God won't get me for that one little white lie."

"You mean the one about the fingerprint?"

"That's the one. I needed some way to loosen sweet little Elsa's tongue. But how did you know?"

"Lieutenant." It was Mark's turn to look pained. "Those pockets are only half an inch in diameter. The thumb of a Leprechaun wouldn't be able to make contact with the inner surface of one of those pockets."

"And a Leprechaun," the Lieutenant grinned, "is something you ain't."

"Well — " Mark asserted, "you've got to admit I was on the ball — and I didn't give the game away."

"Ball, you say? Game?" Cathy Carruthers, the earthling, widened her beautiful eyes in mock naivete. "I thought you were never going to ask."

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THE MOVIE HOUSE MURDERS

by PATRICK SCAFFETTI

THE MOVIE WAS ONE OF THOSE CURRENTLY POPULAR OUTER space melodramas — not my sort of thing at all — but the theater was deliciously cool in contrast to the sweltering heat of the midday city streets. On screen, futuristic space craft soared and plunged in a dazzling display of special effects, but I'd long ago given up trying to follow the complexities of the plot.

Instead, I lounged back in my padded chair, enjoying the semi-frigid atmosphere, and let my mind wander to the eventual motion picture version of my own yet-to-be-written novel, *Michelangelo's Drop Cloth*. It would be a story of life in a large city, bursting with fascinating characters and dramatic incidents. The protagonist was to be a thinly-veiled portrait of myself, Leo Reynolds. I imagined the film role as being played by Al Pacino or Dustin Hoffman. Though I bear absolutely no resemblance to either of these fine actors, their names alone would guarantee the success of the movie, thereby adding to my own renown and wealth. Just thinking about my coming glory made me eager to start writing the novel — no matter that I'd already delayed that step for over fifteen years.

The Madison Theater was only a quarter filled on this Tuesday afternoon, though, under normal conditions, it would probably have been packed with city-dwellers seeking a few hours respite from the baking heat. But conditions in local movie houses were anything but normal, and attendance had been reduced to the foolhardy and the brave. I wasn't quite sure into which category I fit.

Theater business was suffering due to the activities of a madman whom newspapers had dubbed the "Movie House Killer." During the past three weeks, four people had been murdered in the darkness of four different theaters around the city. Though the first couple of slayings had occurred in crowded movie houses, the killer had escaped undetected.

There seemed to be little pattern to the crimes, except for their locations and the quiet, efficient method — each time, a metal ice pick had been driven through the side of the victim's head and deep into his brain. So far, three men and one woman had been killed. No matter how thoroughly the authorities dug into the lives and backgrounds of the victims, they could discover no connections between them whatsoever. Even the types of movies being shown at the times of the murders had ranged from a musical comedy to a grim suspense story. The police could only assume that the Movie House Killer was a psychopath, acting out a horrible, senseless compulsion and, therefore, extremely difficult to apprehend.

The last murder had taken place two days ago at a Sunday evening showing of a war picture. The victim had been a bum sleeping off a drunk in a back row of the Adams Theater. Only when the lights were turned on late that night after the theater had closed did anyone notice the slumped, ragged body with the tell-tale metal handle protruding from his ear.

No one could predict at what time or in which of the city's several theaters the slayer would seek his next victim. As a result, few people attended movies, and a bone-chilling fear gripped the area. The Police Chief had gone so far as to request that all theaters be temporarily closed, but the movie house managers had refused to comply.

SO, EVEN THOUGH TEMPERATURES WERE REACHING RECORD-breaking highs, people still avoided the relief offered by air-conditioned theaters. I certainly couldn't blame them, but the heat had drained me of resistance and, perhaps, common sense. I'd tried to talk my friend, Faye, into joining me, but she had insisted on remaining in her steambath of a novelty shop. She'd also made it clear that she questioned the wisdom of my attending at all. I had come anyway, but I'd taken a seat toward the front of the theater with no other people nearby.

Abruptly, the theme music of the science fiction movie crescendoed, and I saw that the credits were rolling across the screen. Lost in my reverie of future success, I had totally ignored the climax of the picture. I wasn't concerned though — it didn't take a brilliantly original mind to figure out that the white-clad space travelers had squelched

the revolt of the malevolent robots.

With little interest, I watched previews of a new movie entitled *A Juvenile Tragedy* that was to open at the Madison Theater next week. It appeared to be an overblown, sensational study of cruelty and degeneracy in Hollywood. I made a mental note to myself to avoid it. Then, a cartoon came on. Wriggling down into a more comfortable position, I allowed my eyes to sag closed. The words MICHELANGELO'S DROP CLOTH — BASED ON THE NOVEL BY LEO REYNOLDS filled a movie screen in my mind. A smile tugged at the corners of my lips. By God, I would begin putting words on paper as soon I got back to my apartment later that afternoon, I promised myself.

Suddenly, a high-pitched, piercing scream shattered my contentment, and I leapt to my feet. The cartoon had ended, and the theater was bathed in light. I wheeled around in confusion and spied a crowd of people gathered several rows back. Groggily heading toward them, I hoped that my fears were proven wrong.

I nudged my way between a teen-aged boy and a fat woman in a checked dress. The fat woman screamed again, then lapsed into a quivering silence. I drew in a sharp breath when I spotted an old woman slumped in an aisle seat. At first glance, she appeared to be asleep, but closer examination revealed the handle of an ice pick where an earring might have been. Besides, your average sleeping person doesn't bleed profusely.

The Movie House Killer's fifth victim might just as well have been me, I thought, as a shudder racked my body.

"What's the trouble here? I'm the manager." I looked over to see a man in a blue jacket rushing toward us.

An elderly gentleman standing nearby cleared his throat nervously, then said, "When the lights went on after the cartoon, I got up to leave. I happened to glance down at this woman, and I saw the blood."

The fat woman in the checked dress screamed once again, and then collapsed onto a seat. No one paid her any attention.

AN HOUR LATER, I SAT PERCHED ON MY STOOL IN FAYE'S sweltering novelty shop, recounting the horrible murder at the Madison Theater. Faye listened intently as I spoke, frequently puffing on her ever-present cigarette and absently stroking the gray and white cat stretched across her yard-wide lap. The only sign of life from the creature was an occasional contented sigh.

When I concluded my story, Faye slowly shook her head. "So horrible, so horrible," she muttered in her gravelly voice. "Why on earth would anyone randomly murder movie-goers?"

"Who knows?" I shrugged. "The killer must be demented. He

probably doesn't understand what motivates him any better than we do."

"But there's always a motive, Leo." Smoke billowed from Faye's mouth as she spoke. "The motive may stem from some painful, shattering incident in the killer's past that even he doesn't recall any longer. But it's still there, prodding him into action. If we don't accept some sort of a motive, then nothing makes sense."

Faye was getting a bit too Freudian for my tastes, but I made no comment. Instead, I glanced around the tiny, cluttered shop, taking in all of the familiar items. Faye's stock ranged from whoopee cushions to expensive, incredibly life-like masks, and her entire inventory appeared to be out on display. There wasn't a square inch of wall space visible through the miscellany of gag gifts and tricks that covered the interior of the shop.

Faye had owned the novelty shop since long before I'd first come to the city as a young man fifteen years ago. Though she had to be in her fifties, Faye refused to reveal her age. I couldn't understand why. Certainly, it wasn't on account of vanity, because, on a purely physical basis, Faye had nothing to feel vain about. She weighed in the neighborhood of two hundred and twenty pounds, and her face had more nooks and crannies than a dried apple. Surrounded by grizzled, salt-and-pepper hair, her pale blue eyes squinted through a constant haze of cigarette smoke. But those eyes reflected a deep compassion and a keen intelligence. There was usually a stray cat sprawled across Faye's ample lap, though none ever stayed for longer than a few weeks. Her smothering concern for their well-being invariably sent them back to whatever lusty pleasures they'd once pursued amidst the city alleys.

But, despite her physical appearance and idiosyncrasies, Faye was one of the finest people I'd ever known. I valued her friendship and company as much as anything else in my life. She was also the only person other than myself who believed I'd one day be a successful writer. For this, I would be forever grateful to her.

I sighed wearily as a fresh trickle of sweat traveled down my forehead, along my nose, and finally dripped onto my chin. The temperature in the shop was almost unbearable. I looked over toward the door, which Faye had propped open with a brick in hopes of attracting a non-existent breeze. You could almost see the waves of heat rising from the pavement.

AS I GAZED OUTSIDE, A MAN SUDDENLY APPEARED IN THE doorway. I recognized Les Crawford at once. He was a bald, middle-aged pharmacist who owned the drugstore on the corner of the block. His usually amiable face was now a study in contained rage.

"I'm glad you're both here," he said, stepping into the shop. "I've got to talk to somebody."

"What's the problem, Les?" Faye asked.

"The cops just arrested my son," Les explained in a pained voice. "Jim hasn't even been home for a month yet, and the police are already on his back again."

I recalled Jim Crawford as a slender, frail youth who had always been in trouble with the law for one juvenile offense or another. By acting tough and rowdy, he seemed out to prove that he could keep pace with the more rugged kids in the area. Two years ago, when he'd turned eighteen, Jim had run away. He eventually wrote to his father, explaining that he had hitchhiked to Hollywood, California in hopes of becoming an actor. That was the last I'd heard of him until his recent return to the city. Apparently, stardom had eluded him, and he now lived in the apartment above the drugstore with his father. On the few occasions I'd seen him since then, his handsome face had looked troubled and haunted.

"What are the charges against him?" Faye asked.

Struggling to control his emotions, Les said, "They think he might be the Movie House Killer."

I started in surprise, and Faye coughed on her cigarette.

"That's pretty damn serious," I said, immediately regretting my words.

Les nodded. "But it's not true. Jim had nothing to do with those murders."

"They must have some reason to suspect him," Faye said gently.

"Jim was at the theater when the woman was murdered this afternoon," Les said. "Someone saw him running out of the theater shortly before her body was discovered. When they found out that he'd been in Hollywood, the cops figured Jim might hold some crazy grudge against the whole movie business. They insinuated he may be insane enough to commit these killings because he didn't make it in the movies."

"I was at the Madison Theater, too," I said. "I didn't see Jim, but then I sat alone close to the screen."

"Why did Jim run out of the theater?" Faye asked.

"They showed a preview of a movie Jim had had a chance to appear in," Les answered. "Douglas Roman, the director, had convinced Jim that he'd be perfect in the lead role, but, at the last minute, he selected someone else. That was the only break Jim had gotten in Hollywood, and, when it fell through, it completely crushed his spirit. Seeing that preview brought back all of the pain and disappointment he'd suffered. It's not surprising that he ran out of the theater."

It sounded to me as if the authorities had some reason to suspect Jim, but I kept this thought to myself. After all, Les had come to the novelty shop for support, not further condemnation of his son. Still, the slayings had started soon after Jim's return to the city, and he was present at the latest murder, if not the others. By fleeing from the movie house, he had made himself appear even more suspicious. Also, twisted though it might be, Jim had more of a motive than most.

Glancing at Faye, I knew that her thoughts were traveling the same route as mine. But we both kept our peace.

"There are people around here who have more reason to hate the movie business than Jim does," Les said, pounding a fist into his hand. "That crazy old actress, Marie Parrish, used to be a big star until she hit the skids. Now, she's a broken-down has-been. She's dead broke, but she acts as if she's still a movie queen."

I WINCED AT LES'S CRUEL DESCRIPTION OF MARIE PARRISH, though I had to admit that he wasn't too far off base. Marie Parrish had been a well-known, highly-paid actress in the forties, but her career had come to an abrupt halt. She'd made her last film in 1946, and her life had careened straight downhill after that. She'd squandered her wealth, and her beauty had faded with the years. Now, she lived in a seedy apartment building a few blocks away and spent most of her time struggling to maintain the illusion of elegance. She made frequent visits to Faye's shop to purchase costume jewelry and to share memories of her heyday in Hollywood. Faye and I always listened in rapt interest though we'd heard most of the stories over and over again. Marie Parrish was a pathetic, broken woman, but she also unfailingly kind and gracious. Perhaps she was a little crazy, but I could never imagine her wielding an ice pick with deadly intent.

"Then there's that social worker or whatever the hell she is who's been harassing Jim lately," Les continued bitterly. "She used to hang around Marie Parrish, but Jim's become her latest cause. She claims she wants to help anyone who's been victimized by the movie business, but I think she's just plain nuts."

Months back, a young woman had once accompanied Marie Parrish to Faye's shop. Marie had introduced her as a social worker, but I didn't know she devoted herself to Hollywood casualties.

"So why aren't the police questioning people like that?" Les demanded. "There are plenty of likely suspects around here, but they decide to single out Jim because he's got a past record. The authorities just want to pin these killings on someone to get the public off their backs. They're using Jim as a convenient patsy."

"Don't worry, Les," Faye advised. "If Jim is innocent, he'll be back

home before you know it."

"What do you mean 'if he's innocent'?" Les nearly shouted. "Don't tell me you think he might be the killer, too."

"Of course, we don't," Faye said, but her voice lacked conviction. "And if Leo or I can help in any way, please let us know."

Les looked momentarily bewildered, as if realizing for the first time that there was no way that anyone could really help his son. It was simply a matter of waiting, and that wait was sure to be the most agonizing period in Les's life.

"Thanks," he said. Suddenly, he appeared more grief-stricken than angry. "I'd better get back to the drugstore. I don't even remember if I locked the door when I left."

With that, Les turned and walked out into the broiling sunshine.

"What an awful ordeal for a parent to go through," Faye said. "Of course, Les could never accept the possibility that his son might actually be guilty."

"The evidence against Jim is all circumstantial," I said, "but I can certainly understand why the police would want to question him further."

"Let's just hope that Jim is innocent — for Les's sake, as well as his son's."

FAYE AND I LAPSED INTO SILENCE, EACH OF US BUSY WITH our own thoughts. We had spent so much time sitting together in the shop that we'd long ago outgrown the need for steady conversation. Faye and I were quite content merely being together, sharing a quiet companionship. To some, our close friendship must have seemed strange, but we found it warm and satisfying.

Faye was the first to speak. "Les's visit reminds me that Marie Parrish's tiara came in this morning."

I looked at her in puzzlement.

"Marie ordered a paste glass tiara from the novelty catalogue," she explained. "She wanted me to let her know as soon as it arrived."

"Another item to add to her collection of junk jewelry," I commented.

Faye shrugged. "It makes her happy. She pretends it's the real thing, and her golden years don't seem quite so long ago."

Faye slipped a small address book from a shelf under the cash register and thumbed through it. Then, muttering a number to herself, she heaved her bulk erect, grabbed the wall phone, and dialed.

"Hello, Miss Parrish, this is Faye from the novelty shop," she said. "I'm calling to tell you that your tiara has come in."

Then, Faye listened. I could easily imagine Marie Parrish gushing forth her joy on the other end of the line. Her flair for the dramatic,

no longer in professional demand, found expression in nearly every sentence she uttered. A simple conversation with Marie left you feeling as if you'd just spent an evening with Scarlett O'Hara at her giddiest.

Minutes later, Faye finally hung up the phone. "You would have thought she'd just won a million dollars in the lottery," she chuckled. "If only a four-dollar trinket could make everyone so happy."

"I'll bet she's coming right over to pick it up."

Faye nodded. "She's bringing a friend with her. They should be here within the hour."

MARIE PARRISH ENTERED THE SHOP AS IF RUSHING ON STAGE to accept an Academy Award. She smiled radiantly and gasped. "Faye, Leo, how wonderful to see you again."

Marie was wearing a white chiffon dress with a pleated skirt. On her tall, slender frame, it hung like a wrinkled toga. Her wig was a cascading mass of auburn curls that framed a once-beautiful face. Now, her heavily rouged cheeks contrasted starkly with the natural pallor of her neck. Tiny rivulets of perspiration meandering through her make-up gave her skin an alligator-like quality. One false eyelash stuck out like a spider's leg — the final touch of elegance gone sour.

"You look marvelous, Miss Parrish," Faye said.

"Why, thank you, thank you," the actress cried. "You're too kind."

A rotund man in a rumpled beige suit appeared behind her. His bulbous head made it impossible to guess his age. Huge drops of sweat dotted his face like so many glistening warts, and the armpits of his suit were stained dark brown. His blonde hair, bright and stiff with hair spray, must have kept him busy for a good hour each morning. Nearly bald, he'd allowed the outer fringes of his hair to grow very long and then arranged them over his scalp to give the appearance of a full head of hair. It didn't work.

"I'd like you to meet a dear, dear friend of mine," Marie cooed. "Faye, Leo, this is Lawrence Porter."

She scoured our faces for some reaction, then added, "*The Lawrence Porter*, the Hollywood historian."

"Pleasure to meet you," I said, shaking the man's soft, damp hand and wondering what the hell a Hollywood historian was.

"Call me Larry," he instructed in a wheezy voice, surveying the shop with small, sunken eyes.

"Nice to make your acquaintance, Larry," Faye said, forcing a note of awe into her voice. I could tell that she'd never heard of our visitor either.

"Larry is staying at the Berkshire Hotel," Marie explained. "He came here to the city last month just to see me. He's written a couple of

books about show business, but, unfortunately, the fools who publish books refused to print them. Now, Larry is working on a new book that's sure to be a best-seller, though. I've been helping him in my own small way by sharing my recollections with him."

Suddenly, I felt a little more kindly toward Marie's fat, ugly friend. I couldn't help but feel compassion for a struggling writer. On the other hand, if he had been a success, I would have hated his guts.

Larry smiled and said, "Your help is anything but small, Marie. Without you, I could never even attempt to write this book."

"You're so flattering, Larry," Marie said modestly. Then, brightening, she turned to Faye. "Larry has a 16 millimeter print of my last film. He's going to show it tonight at my apartment. I'd be overjoyed if you and Leo could possibly join us."

"I'm sure you'd enjoy the film," Larry added. "It's one of Marie's best."

Faye hesitated, and I said, "Sure, we'd love to see it. What's it called?"

"*Related Through Love*," he answered. "In it, Marie plays a woman who wants to gain custody of her young stepson. Her ex-husband, the boy's father, is a real tyrant. Marie is simply wonderful in her role."

"We'll expect you two around eight-thirty this evening then," Marie said.

"Would nine-thirty be all right?" Faye asked. "I don't close the shop until nine."

"Certainly," Marie agreed. "I'll simply have to delay my beauty sleep for a while longer. My apartment is number 308 on the third floor of the Carlton Arms. Now, where is the tiara? I've been so eager for it to arrive."

From beneath the display counter, Faye drew out a package wrapped in brown paper. She handed it to Marie who snatched it from her grasp. Marie tore off the paper, then carefully examined the tiara, a silver-colored headband studded with large glass diamonds. A blind person wouldn't have mistaken them for the real things.

"Beautiful," Marie murmured. "Simply lovely."

"I'm glad you like it," Faye said.

"It will be perfect with my mink stole."

Marie no more had a mink stole than I had a Rolls Royce, but I said, "It certainly will."

Marie paid Faye the four dollars, emoted breathless farewells, then stepped outside, trailed by her Hollywood historian.

"Don't forget," she called from the street. "Apartment 308."

"We'll be there," I assured her. "We wouldn't miss it for the world."

With a final smile, Marie slipped her hand through Larry's arm, and they proceeded down the street.

"That poor woman breaks my heart," Faye whispered.

"I hope she never lets reality interfere with her illusions," I said. "I doubt if she could stand the shock."

AS ALWAYS, FAYE WAITED UNTIL PRECISELY NINE O'CLOCK before flipping the OPEN sign in the display window to CLOSED. Then, in her slow, deliberate fashion, she fed the stray gray and white cat and transferred the day's profits to a small safe. At last, she locked the front door, and we began walking the few blocks to the Carlton Arms. The night air was hot and moist, and not even a hint of a breeze tempered its smothering effect. Faye's turtle pace seemed even slower than usual, but we finally reached Marie's apartment building.

The Carlton Arms had once been a fashionable hotel, but time and urban blight had exacted their stiff tolls. Now, the eight-story building was a dirty red eyesore, crumbling and neglected.

We rode the creaking elevator to the third floor and found number 308 with no trouble. Marie opened the door before I even had a chance to rap.

"Come in, come in," she cried. "It's so wonderful to have you here."

Wearing a floor-length green kimono, Marie led us down a dark hallway to the living room. Here a single lamp cast its faint glow, and the room appeared to be in a perpetual state of twilight. My first impression was of a beautifully decorated living room, but, as my eyes adjusted to the dimness, I noticed the battered, worn furniture, the threadbare carpeting, and the streaked walls. Like Marie herself, the room strove valiantly for elegance, but its over all effect was sheer pathos.

Larry Porter stood in the center of the room, threading film through a portable movie projector. His labored breathing was clearly audible.

"Hello," he said. "This will be ready to go in a minute."

"Have a seat, please," Marie said. "What can I get you to drink?"

"Beer, if you have it," I said.

"I'd like the same, please," Faye said, plopping her girth onto a sofa. She sunk almost to the floor.

"I'm sure there's some beer," Marie smiled, then left the room.

The living room was very warm, and it was hard to breathe the damp, stale air, heavily laced with Marie's cloying perfume. Sitting on a wooden chair, I felt as if I were coated with a thin layer of sticky oil.

Marie reappeared, carrying a full glass and a can. As she handed

the glass of beer to Faye, she said, "I'm afraid I could only find one glass."

"A can is fine for me," I assured her.

"Showtime," Larry announced brightly.

"I'm so excited," Marie sighed. "I haven't seen this film in years."

"It was your last picture?" I asked.

"Yes," Marie replied. "After I made *Related Through Love*, I bid farewell to Hollywood."

Larry switched off the light and started the projector. The opening credits flashed upon a bare wall, accompanied by loud stringed music. Douglas Roman was listed as the director of the movie. The name sounded very familiar. Then, I recalled that Les Crawford had mentioned Douglas Roman. He had been the director who had promised Jim a role in a film and then changed his mind.

"It seems like only yesterday that I attended the premiere of this film," Marie said. "I hope you like it."

"I'm sure we will," I said.

Five minutes into the black-and-white movie, I decided that I hated it. The plot had little potential to begin with, and Marie Parrish was simply terrible in her role of the kind-hearted stepmother. She overacted to the point of absurdity, and I had to bury smiles in my hand several times.

The sole redeeming feature of *Related Through Love* was the presence of a young blonde-haired boy who played Marie's stepson. He couldn't have been more than six years old, and yet his acting was completely natural and beguiling. Cherub-faced with expressive eyes and a winning grin, the boy effortlessly stole every scene in which he appeared. I couldn't remember his name from the credits, but I felt certain that he must have gone on to achieve some sort of stardom.

It was a relief when the words THE END finally appeared on the wall, but now I wondered what I would tell Marie. After a brief internal debate, I decided it would be easiest to lie.

LARRY TURNED ON THE LAMP AGAIN, FILLING THE ROOM with dusky light.

"How did you like it?" Marie asked expectantly.

"It was terrific," I said. "You were fantastic in your part."

"Thank you," Marie smiled. "And you, Faye?"

"I enjoyed every minute of it."

"Who was the little boy who played Rodney?" I inquired. "He certainly did an outstanding job."

"That poor, poor child," Marie said in a tragic tone. "Such a dear little boy to have suffered so."

"His name was Billy Maxwell," Larry said.

"What ever became of him?" Faye asked. "How did he suffer?"

Marie sighed and rolled her eyes skyward. "It's a terribly sad tale — both for Billy and myself. It was on account of Billy that my own career ended so abruptly."

"What happened?" I asked.

"*Related Through Love* was directed by Douglas Roman, one of the meanest bastards who ever lived," Larry explained in a strained voice. "He pushed and abused Billy Maxwell mercilessly. The poor kid was only six years old, but Roman made him put in a full day's work. He constantly badgered and belittled the boy. He even went so far as to threaten him with horrible punishments if he didn't follow the director's orders."

"Couldn't anybody stop him?" Faye asked.

"Unfortunately, Larry's mother wanted him to be a movie star more than anything else," Larry said. "She was a stage mother to the umpteenth degree. She went along with everything that Roman did to Billy, fearing that he might drop Billy from the film if she caused a fuss. She stood by and watched the director abuse her only child without a word of protest. Life would have been even worse for the kid if it hadn't been for Marie."

"I made the mistake of sticking up for Billy," Marie said. "I couldn't tolerate the way Roman mistreated him, and I made my feelings very clear. Roman and I had some terrible rows on the set. I'm sure I would have been even better in the film if things had been peaceful during the production. Roman swore that he'd ruin my career if I continued to interfere. I didn't believe him, and I went on defending Billy. When he struck Billy for forgetting a line, I took the boy and walked off the set. An hour later, Roman came and apologized. He only did it to get me to complete the film. When *Related Through Love* was finished, he saw to it that both Billy and I were permanently black-balled from Hollywood. Neither one of us ever made a film since then."

"How awful," Faye muttered.

"Yes, it was," Larry agreed.

"Douglas Roman is still working on movies, though, isn't he?" I asked.

"He certainly is," Larry replied bitterly. "The old son of a bitch has a new film opening next week. It's called *A Juvenile Tragedy*."

"What is Billy Maxwell doing now?" I wondered aloud.

"No one really knows," Larry said. "He disappeared from Hollywood shortly after the film was completed. There were some rumors that he ended up in a mental institution. I'm going to reveal the whole

ugly story in the book I'm working on now. Maybe then people will realize what a horrible, sadistic man Roman really is."

"It's a shame that Connie Howe wasn't around to help him," Marie said.

"Who's Connie Howe?" I asked.

"Oh, I'm sure you've seen her, Leo," Marie replied. "She's a social worker whose special cause is helping anyone who was hurt by Hollywood. I find her to be rather a nuisance, but she means well."

"There can't be all that many people around here who were in the movie business," I said.

"There are a few," Marie said. "Connie works for the city social services agency most of the time. But she keeps an eye out for stray actors and actresses. She pesters me, and she's been trying to help a boy who recently left Hollywood after a big disappointment."

"That must be Jim Crawford," Faye said.

"Yes, that was the name she mentioned," Marie said. "In fact, it was Douglas Roman who caused all of this young man's problems, too."

"Roman has hurt an awful lot of people during his lifetime," Larry said.

Thinking of young Billy Maxwell so callously abused and rejected made me seethe with anger. He would be close to forty now, and I wondered if he'd ever lived down his terrible experience with the motion picture business. Such early wounds leave ugly scars that never completely disappear.

SHORTLY AFTER MIDNIGHT, FAYE AND I LEFT MARIE Parrish's apartment. The streets were empty and still as we walked through the darkness.

"Leo, all evening the movie house murders have been preying on my mind," Faye said.

"Why is that?" I asked.

"Maybe I'm way off in left field, but there seems to be a few connections here, Leo. The name of Douglas Roman has come up over and over again. Jim Crawford fled the theater because of previews of Roman's new film were shown. Shortly afterward, Jim was arrested. Then, tonight, we learn that Douglas Roman is a horribly cruel man who was instrumental in destroying Marie's career."

"So what new light does any of that shed on the movie house killings?" I asked.

"Perhaps none at all, but it is rather curious. I'd like to dig into the whole thing a little deeper." The excitement in her voice was unmistakable.

"But the police are already doing everything in their power to catch the killer," I protested.

"They can always use a little extra help, Leo. Besides, we just might be able to come up with something they've overlooked. Don't forget we've done it before."

I chuckled grimly. Faye was slipping into her Nero Wolfe role again, which required me to become Archie Goodwin. Like Wolfe, Faye was capable of brilliant deductions, and she seldom strayed from her own turf. Both of them also carried a hell of a lot of weight. A la Archie, I'd have to do the legwork. Then, once I'd gathered the information, we'd do our best to piece the puzzle together. The major differences between us and the residents of the brownstone on West 35th Street was that we wouldn't earn a cent for our troubles — and there was no Rex Stout to guide the action to a safe conclusion. In other words, one of us could get killed.

"Where do you figure on starting your investigation?" I asked with mild sarcasm.

Ignoring my tone, Faye said, "With Connie Howe, the social worker. She knows both Jim and Marie. Maybe she can give us more information to go on. You can visit her tomorrow, Leo. Depending on what she has to say, we'll decide what, if anything, we should do next. Come over tomorrow morning, and we'll find out where you can go to see Connie Howe."

I sighed as we neared the novelty shop. I knew that there was no point in trying to reason with Faye once she'd made up her mind. When it came to helping her friends, she was never satisfied to let the police do their work unassisted.

"I'll see you in the morning, Faye," I said.

"Good night, Leo." Faye fitted her key into the lock and disappeared into the novelty shop.

Continuing on toward my apartment house at the end of the block, I hoped that the police caught the Movie House Killer soon. I wasn't all that eager to stick my nose into their terrain.

"YOU'VE GOT AN APPOINTMENT TO SEE CONNIE HOWE AT eleven o'clock," Faye said the next morning, as she poured me a cup of coffee.

Still a little groggy from a restless night's sleep, I asked, "How'd you arrange that so quickly?"

"I simply called the social services office and asked to speak to her," Faye replied. "She's eager to see you, Leo."

Something in the tone of Faye's voice led me to suspect that there was more to her story. "Why is she so eager?" I asked.

Faye transformed a quarter of her cigarette to ash with a single drag, then said, "I told her you were a screenplay writer for the movies, Leo. I figured it would be the easiest way to get you in to see her."

"Was I a successful screenplay writer?"

"Of course not, Leo. Otherwise, you'd still be in Hollywood writing, wouldn't you? She thinks you wrote a string of unsalable scripts and were finally sent packing by the studio bigwigs. Miss Howe is expecting to meet a very depressed and disappointed man, Leo. But, once you're in her office, you can handle things however you see fit. just find out what she knows about ex-film people around here and the movie house murders."

"You realize that Connie Howe once saw me," I reminded her. "She came to the shop with Marie."

"Leo, your face isn't all that memorable," Faye said matter-of-factly. "I doubt if she'll recognize you after all this time."

CONNIE HOWE WAS A VERY PLEASANT-LOOKING YOUNG woman with an open, friendly smile. Her well-scrubbed, roundish face was the portrait of glowing health, and her dark brown eyes radiated sincerity and warmth.

Now, sitting across her desk from me, it was obvious that she didn't recall my face. "The woman who phoned this morning told me that you're having a hard time adjusting to the real world after your stay in Hollywood," she said sympathetically.

"That's right," I nodded. "A couple of well-known producers led me to believe that I'd have a great future as a screenwriter. They praised my work and bought three of my screenplays. Then, the next thing I knew, they were booting me out of the door. I traveled aimlessly around the country for a few months, until I ended up here in the city."

"Hollywood, the great dream factory," she said sadly. "You're not alone, Mr. Reynolds. There are countless others like you who were lured by the charms of the movie business, only to be hurt and discarded. There's a bright, glittering veneer there, but it's a lie. Underneath, it's corrupt and foul. Hollywood treats people as if they were tissues — it uses them and then casts them aside."

Connie Howe's soft voice trembled with emotion as she spoke, revealing a tightly-reined passion beneath her calm exterior.

"Were you ever in Hollywood?" I asked.

"I was born there, Mr. Reynolds," she replied. "Believe me when I say that I know how cruel a place it can be."

"Were you involved in the movie business?"

Miss Howe looked deep into my eyes, and I was afraid she'd see me for the sham I was. Somehow, I forced myself to return her gaze

without wavering. At last, she said, "You're a writer, Mr. Reynolds. Perhaps, someday, you can write about what a wasteland the movie industry really is. You've had your own personal experiences there, and maybe mine will help you to understand the barbarism even more. All of the other victims of Hollywood I've known recently have been too wrapped up in their own despair to wonder about me, but I can see that you're different. That's why I'm going to tell you something I haven't told anyone else in this city."

As I stared expectantly at Connie Howe, I felt a mounting sense of guilt. I was here in her office under false pretenses, and, yet, she was about to confide in me. Though I was eager to hear what she had to say, I wished that I hadn't deceived her as to my true identity.

"As I already told you, Mr. Reynolds, I was born in Hollywood," Connie Howe began. "My mother was a young starlet named Eve Howe. She'd appeared in a few bit parts in B movies, and then she met a director who promised to make her a star. She fell for his line and allowed him to seduce her. A few months later, she found out that she was pregnant with his baby. When she told the director, he denied their relationship and dropped her completely. He didn't offer her even a dime. My mother stayed in California, gave birth to me, and started her headlong descent. She worked as a waitress to support us, but she never gave up her dream of becoming an actress. She turned to booze and men for comfort from her betrayal. Finally, when I was eight years old, she committed suicide, a broken and bitter woman."

Miss Howe paused, as if gathering her thoughts, before continuing. "After Mom was gone, I lived in a series of foster homes. I suppose that's why I became a social worker — I wanted to help others who found themselves in horrible straights. And, though it really doesn't fit into my job description, I've done everything in my power to counsel and help people like you, Mr. Reynolds — people who were victimized by Hollywood and all that it represents."

As I reflected on her story, a startling question popped into my head. "Miss Howe, do you know who your father is?" I asked.

"Yes, my mother spoke of him with loathing quite often. He's Douglas Roman."

Another link in a bizarre and complicated chain, I thought. Douglas Roman's name had come up once again. But he was in California, thousands of miles away. How could he possibly have any connection to the murders in our city?

"Have you ever spoken to your father?"

"Never," Connie replied firmly. "And I never want to, either." She hesitated, then said, "But enough about me, Mr. Reynolds. How can I help you?"

"Just talking to you has been a help," I answered. "It's somehow comforting to know that I'm not the only one who has been treated unfairly by the motion picture industry."

"You certainly aren't alone, Mr. Reynolds. In fact, there are others right here in this city who have been betrayed by the movies."

"Who?" I asked.

"Well, there's an actress who was quite well-known in the forties. She argued with Douglas Roman about his harsh treatment of a child actor, and he saw to it that her film career ended. She now lives in the city in a run-down apartment building. And there's a young man who went to Hollywood a few years ago to become an actor. He returned home recently, shattered and disillusioned. He, too, had been used by my father. Even the people on the fringes of the movie business can be hurt by it. For instance, Lewis Kent. He owns and operates the Rialto Theater just a few blocks from here. He shows only family films, and he's going broke. All most people want to see are movies saturated with sex and violence. Lew is trying to make wholesome entertainment available to the public, and his efforts have brought him to the verge of bankruptcy. He's afraid that he's going to have to sell out pretty soon."

Connie Howe stopped talking and gave me a wan smile. "So, you see, Mr. Reynolds, you are definitely not alone," she said. "The system has abused others, too."

"I don't know if it's the whole system or just Douglas Roman," I commented. "Your father sounds like a heartless man."

"My father is a son of a bitch," Connie said. "Now, Mr. Reynolds, do you need help finding a job? Or some cash to tide you over for a while?"

"No," I answered. "But I want to thank you for your time, Miss Howe. You've helped me to realize that I'm lucky to have gotten out of Hollywood when I did."

"Then I consider this time very well spent."

When I left Connie Howe's office a short while later, I vowed to myself that I'd return and apologize for my ruse as soon as the movie house murders were solved. The young social worker was sincere and caring. She deserved better than my lies and deception.

BACK ON THE SUN-BAKED STREET, I HEADED TOWARD Faye's novelty shop. Halfway there, I decided to make a quick detour and visit the Rialto Theater. Lewis Kent was the only unfamiliar name that Connie Howe had mentioned, and I was curious about him. I wondered if perhaps he, too, were somehow connected to Douglas Roman, though I couldn't imagine any possible link. Still, there were

no solid clues to the movie house killings, and anyone who harbored resentment against the film industry was a suspect.

The Rialto was situated in the middle of a long city block, sandwiched between an ADULTS ONLY bookstore and a bar that featured topless dancers. The Rialto's marquee read FAMILY ENTERTAINMENT and advertised two Walt Disney films that were currently showing. It seemed somehow pathetic, like the last mum in a late autumn landscape. Here in the city, the Rialto had less of a chance of surviving than the freezing flower.

The tiny box office was closed, but the front door was unlocked. I stepped into the theater lobby, paused briefly to enjoy the air-conditioned interior, then called out, "Hello. Is anybody here?"

Seconds later, a door opened, and a frail, haggard-looking man appeared, carrying a broom. He ran a weary hand over his thinning hair and said, "Show doesn't start until two this afternoon."

"Are you Lewis Kent?" I asked.

"Yes," he answered. "If you're from the real estate agency, you can save your breath. I'm not selling this place."

"I'm not a real estate man," I said. "I would like to ask you a few questions though."

"What about?" he demanded, leaning his broom against the wall.

"About the movie house murders," I replied.

"You a detective?"

"A private investigator," I said, stretching the truth. I'd gone from a failed screenwriter to an investigator in less than ten minutes. Which was closest to the real Leo Reynolds? I wondered.

"Thank God that madman hasn't hit the Rialto yet," Kent said. "But then the only patrons I get are a few kids. The Movie House Killer seems to prefer older people and crowded theaters."

"Have you noticed any suspicious-looking individuals around here?"

Kent shook his head. "Like I said, all I get are a few kids. Won't be too long before I have to close down. One guy has already been pestering me to sell the place. He wants to turn the Rialto into a porno theater."

"Have you ever heard of Douglas Roman?" I asked.

"Sure, who hasn't? One of the biggest directors in the business. It's on account of him and his kind that I'm going under. Hardly anyone makes decent family films anymore."

"Doesn't Roman make quality movies?"

Kent shrugged. "Not my kind of quality. A few weeks back, I saw a screening of his latest movie, *A Juvenile Tragedy*. It's about a child

actor and how he's destroyed by his experiences in Hollywood. The director of a movie the kid appears in is a tyrannical monster, and the kid's mother is a bitch. It traces the boy's life until he's in his early twenties, and things get worse as he gets older. He ends up in a mental institution. Sadism, obscenity, perversions. You name the vice, *A Juvenile Tragedy* has got it. Now that may be your definition of quality, but it's sure not mine."

Listening to Kent, I felt a queasy blob form in the pit of my stomach. Apparently, Douglas Roman had made a movie based on his own inhuman treatment of little Billy Maxwell and the boy's breakdown afterward. My God, how could the man be that callous? I asked myself in disgust.

"That movie is opening at the Madison Theater next week," I said.

"It's opening all over the country, not just around here," he said.

"Several area theaters have booked it."

A terrifying thought skittered through my mind, and I drew in a sharp breath. "Do you know which theaters beside the Madison will be showing it?" I asked.

"Sure," Kent said. "Movie House owners receive a listing of what's coming up at other area theaters several weeks in advance. I've got the list right over here." He walked over to the darkened concession stand and slipped a paper from the counter. Studying it, he said, "*A Juvenile Tragedy* will be at the Riverfront, the Capitol, the Adams, the Madison, the Woods, and the State. In short, it'll be all over the city. But, if the Movie House Killer isn't stopped, no one is going to see it. People are afraid to go to the show at all nowadays. Who wants to take the chance of getting an ice pick through the ear just to see a movie?"

"Thanks for your time, Mr. Kent," I said in a choked voice. "You've been very helpful."

I TURNED AND RUSHED FROM THE COOL THEATER INTO A wall of heat. Running down the block, I drew in heavy, painful breaths, but I forced my legs to work faster. I had to get to Faye's as soon as possible. Lewis Kent had given me the probable key to the movie house murders, and I wanted to share my discovery with Faye at once. Together we could decide on our next step.

Faye was alone in the shop when I burst through the open doorway.

"Good grief, Leo, what's going on?" Faye asked. "Are you all right?"

I opened my mouth to speak, but I didn't have enough breath to utter any words. Instead, I stood there, panting, dripping sweat, and wondering whether my heartbeat would ever return to normal or stop completely. Gradually, I gathered enough air to gasp out, "All of the

murders took place in theaters where Douglas Roman's new movie is opening next week."

Faye stared at me in bewilderment. "Calm down, Leo," she said. "Then start at the beginning, and tell me what you found out."

I walked over to the soft drink cooler in the corner, pulled out an ice cold Coke, then climbed onto my stool. I brought the bottle to my lips and tasted metal.

"You've got to open the bottle first, Leo," Faye said. She took it from my hand, uncapped it, and gave it back to me.

Finally, when I felt able to speak, I told Faye about my morning. I gave her detailed accounts of my visits with Connie Howe and Lewis Kent. She listened closely, leaning forward and dragging on her cigarette.

"So there might well be a connection between the movie house murders and Douglas Roman, after all," I concluded. "Only the Capitol Theater hasn't had a murder yet, and I'll wager that the next killing takes place there."

Faye gave no immediate response. She gazed off into space, occasionally mumbling to herself. I knew that she was sorting through the few facts we had and trying to arrange them into a logical pattern.

At last, she said, "Leo, the whole thing sounds completely mad, and yet it makes a crazy kind of sense, too."

I nodded, eager to hear her conclusion.

"Unless we're totally off the track, Douglas Roman seems to be the pivotal character in everything that's been going on," Faye said.

"I'd recommend you go home and shower first," Faye advised.

"But several people who have good reason to hate him are nearby," Faye reminded me. "Marie Parrish's career was ruined by Roman. Jim Crawford feels he was betrayed by him. Roman's own daughter detests him. Even Lewis Kent hates the director because of the type of movies he makes. All of these people are in a one mile radius of each other. Any one of them would probably be delighted if *A Juvenile Tragedy* flopped around here because people were too frightened to go to theaters to see it. But who, if any of them, is insane enough to commit these murders just to scare people out of movie houses?"

"I don't know," I said. "If our deductions are right, I wonder if the killer realizes he's probably helping the success of the movie in the long run. *A Juvenile Tragedy* will receive tons of free publicity once the story breaks. Everyone will flock to see it all over the country."

"My guess is that the killer isn't rational enough to realize this," Faye said. "Maybe all he wants to do is hurt the picture in his own city."

"What are we going to do?"

"We need more information on Douglas Roman," Faye said. "Leo, you probably know the library better than anyone else in the city. Go there and research Roman. Find out everything you can about him. Maybe you'll discover something that will help us to make some sense out of the killings."

"All right," I agreed, rising from my stool. I wasn't about to question the opportunity to sit in air-conditioned comfort and read.

"I'd recommend you go home and shower first," Faye advised. "I'm afraid they'd revoke your library card if you went smelling as you do."

"You try running in this heat," I snapped,

"Don't take offense, Leo. I'm only being honest."

WALKING TOWARD THE LIBRARY AFTER A HURRIED SHOWER, I realized that this was one of the greatest advantages to living in a large city. Our public library was mammoth, containing thousands upon thousands of books. I intended to donate five copies of *Michelangelo's Drop cloth* to the library as soon as the novel was written and published.

I spent the next few hours seated in the reading room of the library poring over every piece of information I could find on Douglas Roman. There was more than enough material to keep me busy. Nearly every book on the movie business contained long sections devoted to Roman's career and accomplishments.

Gradually, as I read, a very unflattering portrait of the director began to take shape in my mind. Now in his sixties, he had always been a callous egomaniac who would resort to any means necessary to get what he wanted. Over the years, he had betrayed associates and ruined careers. He had been married four times and had engaged in countless affairs. Many of his films were held in low critical esteem, but none of them had ever failed to make money. The more I learned about this ruthless man, the more I understood how easy it would be to hate him.

It was after seven o'clock when I opened the last book in my pile, a thick volume entitled *Hollywood: Tarnished Tinsel*. I scanned the index for Roman's name and opened to the page indicated. I quickly read the material I already knew, but I paid closer attention when I came across references to Marie Parrish, Billy Maxwell, and the making of *Related Through Love*.

This film marked the end of two show business careers. *Related Through Love* features the final

screen appearances of Marie Parrish and Billy Maxwell. Both became Hollywood has-beens almost overnight because they had invoked the wrath of Douglas Roman. Marie Parrish has lived in anonymous seclusion ever since. The last word on Billy Maxwell is that he's writing a book on the motion picture business.

Beneath this paragraph were three photos. I recognized the first two immediately — stills of Marie Parrish and Billy Maxwell from *Related Through Love*. I glanced at the third picture, then examined it more closely in shocked disbelief. It showed a young, fat-faced, balding man. The caption under the photo read: "Recent photo of Billy Maxwell."

The man in the picture was clearly Larry Porter.

I muttered an incredulous obscenity, and an elderly woman seated nearby shot me a scathing look. I ignored her and rushed from the library.

Faye was waiting for me at the door of her shop when I arrived. Before I had a chance to speak, she said, "Marie Parrish just called. She's very frightened and wants us to come over right away."

"Wait until you hear what I found out at the library," I said, as Faye locked the front door.

"What?"

"Larry Porter is Billy Maxwell."

Faye's mouth dropped open in surprise. "Then we really do have to hurry. Marie may be in real danger. She told me over the phone that someone might try to kill her, but she wouldn't say who it was. It must be Porter."

Faye and I set off at a fast pace for Marie's apartment, but Faye's weight and the heat soon caught up with her.

"Leo, you run ahead," she panted. "I'll follow. Marie may need help right now."

"Okay," I said. "I'll see you there."

By the time I reached Marie's apartment building, I felt as if my lungs were about to burst. I leaned against the wall of the elevator as it carried me upward and tried to catch my breath. It arrived at the third floor too quickly, and my legs felt wobbly as I headed down the hall toward Marie's apartment.

I knocked loudly on the door, but there was no response. Then I heard a feeble scratching noise coming from inside. I turned the knob, discovered the door was unlocked, and slowly pushed it open. Some-

thing prevented it from opening very wide, and I slipped through the narrow entrance.

In the dimly lit apartment, I saw immediately what was blocking the door. Marie Parrish was lying on the floor, her fingers clawing helplessly at the door. The carpet around her was heavily stained with blood.

I knelt beside her, and she looked at me with pain-filled eyes.

"Leo, Larry Porter is —" she began, then groaned in agony.

"Billy Maxwell," I finished for her. "I know. I'll call an ambulance."

"No time," Marie whispered. "Stabbed me few minutes ago on his way to the cap —" Suddenly, Marie gasped, and her eyes rolled back in her head. I felt for her carotid artery, but I could detect no pulse. There was no doubt in my mind that Marie Parrish was dead.

"Cap." I repeated Marie's final word to myself. "Cap." Then, abruptly, I recalled that there was only one theater which would be showing *A Juvenile Tragedy* where a murder had yet to take place. The Capitol.

If Larry Porter had left for the Capitol Theater a few minutes before my arrival, there was no time to phone for the police. I retraced my steps to the elevator, and, this time, its descent seemed unbearably slow. As I rushed out the front door, I nearly collided with Faye.

"Marie Parrish is dead," I blurted out. "Larry Porter stabbed her. He's at the Capitol Theater."

I wheeled and dashed down the street. Though I hated running, this was my third race of the day. It also had to be my fastest. A moment's delay could give Larry Porter the time he needed to claim his sixth and final victim.

THE CAPITOL THEATER WAS ON THE BLOCK PERPENDICULAR to the Carlton Arms apartment building. I rounded the corner at a frantic clip, sped down the street, and dashed into the theater. The woman in the ticket booth shouted something at me, but I ignored her.

I hurried across the lobby and pushed open the door to the darkened theater. I couldn't see a thing except for the gigantic man and woman locked in a passionate embrace on the screen. I stepped forward, stumbled, and fell flat on my face. Back on my feet, I stood motionless while my eyes adjusted to the darkness.

At last, I was able to make out the silhouettes of the dozen or so seated movie patrons, and I searched frantically for one that resembled Larry Porter. In the last row, on the other side of the theater, I spotted a large black arm slowly begin to reach forward.

"Stop, Larry," I shouted. "Get out of the way, everybody. The Movie House Killer is here."

Pandemonium broke loose then. The few patrons cried out in fear and rushed into the aisles. I saw Larry leap toward the exit. I ran out the door I'd recently entered, and spied Larry Porter walking rapidly toward the doorway leading to the street.

"Larry, stop," I hollered, but he acted as if he hadn't heard me.

"Billy Maxwell," I called out, moving toward him.

The fat man halted abruptly and looked over at me. Slowly, the expression of panic on his face changed to a grotesque, impish grin. He waited for me as if he were a small boy caught raiding the cookie jar. His hands clasped behind his back, he stared at the floor.

As a crowd gathered around us, he said, "I'm really sorry, and I promise I'll never do it again. Please don't be mad at me." The voice was high-pitched and childish. It sent icy shivers down my spine.

"Don't punish me. Boys are expected to get into a little mischief." Larry shifted his weight from one foot to the other. "Besides, I'm a star." Then, proudly, he looked up into the faces of the people around him. "And I'll bet you're all my fans."

"Oh, Jesus Christ," I moaned in horror.

At that moment, a policeman approached. "What's going on here?" he demanded.

Knowing that he probably wouldn't believe me, I began to explain anyway.

THE NEXT EVENING, A THUNDER SHOWER ENVELOPED THE city, and the heat wave finally broke. I felt almost comfortable as I sat on my stool in Faye's novelty shop, listening to the sheets of rain lashing the street. But I knew that my nerves would suffer the effects of the past few days for a long time to come.

After Larry Porter/Billy Maxwell's arrest the night before, Faye and I had spent interminable hours at the police station, answering and reanswering an endless stream of questions. Yet I couldn't blame the police for their skepticism, even after Larry Porter had confessed to being the Movie House Killer.

Now, alone in the shop with Faye, I could hear Larry's voice as he'd attempted to explain his actions. It had alternated between that of a whining, frightened child and an anguished adult. At times he spoke as if he'd actually been addressing Douglas Roman, pleading for leniency. That voice would haunt my dreams for the rest of my life.

"I wonder if Douglas Roman has heard about any of this yet," I remarked, as much to myself as Faye.

"I'm sure he has," Faye replied. "What I wonder is whether or not he cares."

"He's probably pleased about the whole thing, because the publicity is sure to help his movie."

"God damned monster!" To Faye, who rarely swore, this was no idle epithet.

I tamped fresh tobacco into my pipe, and Faye lit a cigarette. The gray and white cat on her lap squinted in annoyance at the billows of smoke.

Without warning, someone hurried into the shop, and I looked up with a start.

"Hello, Mr. Reynolds," said Connie Howe, as she closed her dripping umbrella.

"M--Miss Howe," I stammered. "I was planning to visit your office tomorrow. I owe you an explanation, as well as an apology."

"You helped to apprehend the killer," she said. "You don't owe me a thing."

I introduced the young social worker to Faye, then said, "I suppose my picture in today's paper tipped you off as to who I really am."

Connie nodded. "I decided to come and see you to clear up some confusion in my own mind. I know that my father had a lot to do with Billy Maxwell's mental disintegration, but the newspapers weren't clear on a few points. For instance, did Marie know that Larry Porter was Billy Maxwell all along?"

"Yes," I replied. "At least, that's what he told the police last night. After a long search, he located Marie here in the city and then came to enlist her aid in writing a book about Douglas Roman. He wanted to expose your father as the ruthless sadist he truly is. Marie readily agreed to help him and promised to keep his identity a secret. Larry believed it would be far more dramatic if he revealed that he was actually Billy Maxwell after the book was published."

"The man must have been completely insane," Connie muttered.

Larry Porter had spent several years in a mental hospital," Faye said. "He never fully recovered from his early experiences in Hollywood. He didn't make another film after *Related Through Love*, and his mother tormented him without mercy for this. She was as responsible for driving him mad as Roman."

I shook my head in dismay. "It was Marie who first told Larry about *A Juvenile Tragedy*. When he learned that Roman had made a movie about what he'd done to Billy, Larry went completely off the deep end. More than anything, he wanted to ruin any chance of success the movie might have. He did it in the most effective way his twisted mind could

conceive of — by committing a series of murders to frighten people out of going to theaters. He did all of the killings in movie houses that were scheduled to show *A Juvenile Tragedy*. He tried to keep his murderous activities a secret from Marie, but, somehow, she found out what he was doing. When that happened, he saw no way out except to kill her, too. She called Faye for help, but, unfortunately, we got to her too late."

Tears shone in Connie Howe's eyes. "I thank God I never knew my father," she said. "But I'll never be able to live down the fact that I'm his daughter."

"We can't take responsibility for our parents' actions any more than they can for ours," Faye said gently.

"You're right," Connie whispered. "I only wish I could believe that in my heart."

"You're doing everything you possibly can to help people," I added.

"I doubt if I can ever do enough to make up for him," she said.

"But I'll never stop trying."

"Would you like some coffee?" Faye asked.

Connie forced her lips into a half-smile and shook her head. "No thanks. I'd better be going. Good-night, and thank you for the information."

With that, she opened her umbrella and slipped back into the stormy night.

Alone once again, Faye and I sat for a long time without speaking. Finally, I drew on my pipe and said, "Considering all that's happened, I'm not even sure I'll sell the movie rights to *Michelangelo's Drop Cloth*."

"You've got plenty of time to decide on that, Leo," Faye said.

"First, you've got to write it."


There was no arguing that point, so I didn't even try.

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blazes a fiery trail across two continents
to bring a dangerous band of foreign spies
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Based on the newspaper
cartoon sensation

The car was underwater, with something valuable in the trunk. Was it just the antique chest locked in there — or was there something more, like a dead body?

THE SUNKEN CAR

by EDWARD D. HOCH

WHEN PEOPLE ASK ME WHAT SORT OF PRIVATE DETECTIVE I am, I tell them I'm fifty years old and most of the time I keep my gun locked in an old iron safe in the office. I'm certainly not the sort who goes off scuba diving after sunken automobiles. In fact, if someone had approached me a year earlier with the Grange case I'd have turned it down without a second thought.

But that was when I was still *Al Darlan Investigations*, before young Mike Trapper, just out of college, walked into my office and offered to invest ten thousand dollars in the business. Now we were *Darlan & Trapper Investigations*, and things were a whole lot different.

I suppose that Mike Trapper, with his blond good looks, made me feel something like a father for the first time in my life. I found myself putting up with his complaints about the state of the office with more

sheer patience than I'd exhibited in years.

"I thought we were going to get a secretary," he said on that morning in August when the Grange business began. "I put up the money for one, you know."

"We had other expenses," I pointed out, not bothering to detail the complications in the first case he'd handled with me. He knew them well enough.

"But I've got a client coming in at ten o'clock! How's it going to look with the two of us sitting here twiddling our thumbs?"

"Who's the client?"

"Henry Grange. I told you he called yesterday. He's looking for an agency that could arrange for the services of a scuba diver. I figure we can collect a double fee. I was a scuba diver in college."

"You collect a double fee and we'll hire a secretary," I promised.

Our conversation was cut short by Henry Grange's arrival. He wasn't alone. And the woman with him certainly wasn't Mrs. Grange. She looked like one of the exotic dancers from the bar down the block. "This is Belle," he said after he'd introduced himself. "Belle Engler. She's a close friend as well as a business partner. She has an interest in this business too."

"And what business is that?" Mike Trapper asked, pulling forward a yellow pad and pencil.

Grange eyed him a bit disconcertingly. "Somehow I expected you to be older. I have a son who looks older than you do."

"I'm the brains of the outfit," I said from my desk. "I just keep Mike around because he looks good. Tell me what we can do for you."

"Last September my son was driving back to college. He'd left his mother's house around six — a bit drunk, I guess, or high on pot. Anyway he drove the car into the Devon Reservoir. I learned recently there was something valuable in the trunk and now I'd like it recovered. Belle has convinced me it's foolish to let it rot there."

"This is a bit out of line," I said. "Couldn't a tow truck —?"

"The accident occurred the evening before the reservoir was swelled to twice its size by the diversion of the Panic River. You probably read about it. By the following morning the car was a hundred feet away from the shore and fifty feet down. Only a scuba diver could reach it and stay down long enough to get the trunk open. My ex-wife gave me a key but I doubt if it'll work now. Belle thought a private detective agency might know some of the divers the police use."

"We have our own diver," Mike assured him. "But it won't be cheap."

"I'm prepared to pay whatever it costs."

The whole thing bothered me. "You could hire a diver yourself."

Belle Engler spoke up for the first time. "We need security until the job is done." She sat with her legs crossed and her dress up over her knees and I could see Mike taking it all in. She was probably thirty-five, but with those legs and that bosom age didn't matter.

"If you mean a hired gun, I rarely carry a weapon, Miss Engler."

She shifted her blue eyes to Mike. "Then perhaps Mr. Trapper can fill the bill."

"Perhaps," I agreed. "That's why we're a team."

"Tell me what we'll be after in the trunk," Mike said, continuing to make notes on his yellow pad like some sort of advertising executive.

Grange sucked in his breath, running a hand through thinning gray hair. "A piece of antique furniture. A small chest of a type sometimes called a Connecticut chest, with carved tulip decorations. They're rare and quite valuable, dating from around the year 1700. My wife and I are divorced and I haven't been living at home. I had no idea Hank Junior — that's my son — was taking the chest back to college with him to use as something of a foot locker. In fact I only learned recently that it's probably still in the trunk of that sunken car."

"I still don't understand the need for security," I commented.

"The piece is valuable, if it's in there. I don't want to take a chance on the divers stealing it." He paused a moment. "Or anyone else."

"Does your son say it's in there?"

"My former wife says he took it with him. Since the accident my son and I haven't communicated."

"I see," I said, though I saw very little.

Mike told him our daily fee, then added, "Plus a hundred an hour for the scuba diver."

"That's agreeable," Belle Engler answered for both of them.

"Do you need an advance?"

"It's customary," I responded. "And of course we'll need to know the exact location of the car."

Grange nodded impatiently. He seemed anxious to be gone. "You're to contact the local sheriff there — fellow named Todd Largo. He can show you the spot."

After they'd gone, Mike Trapper looked at me and said, "What do you think is in that trunk — a body?"

"Or else a stash of drugs sonny-boy was taking back to sell at college. One thing's for sure — it won't be an antique chest!"

TODD LARGO TURNED OUT TO BE A LOCAL INSURANCE MAN who doubled as the sheriff in the county that included Devon Reser-

voir. "Not much crime up here," he told us. "Not many people. No need for a full-time sheriff. But the people elected me, so I serve."

"So this is where our water comes from," Mike said, looking out over the mirror-like surface of the reservoir.

"Not yet, it doesn't. The state only enlarged it back last September. It's sort of a reserve reservoir, you know, till they finish the last section of the new pipeline. But it'll be in use by next spring."

"A reserve reservoir," Mike Trapper repeated. "Well, can you tell us about this accident? The one involving the Grange vehicle?"

"Sure can! That was the night before the river was diverted, which is why I remember it so well. That night the car went off the road and into some pretty shallow water. But by morning it was way out in the middle. There was no way of getting it out."

"Almost as if someone planned it that way," I said.

"Naw, the kid was in a hurry and he wasn't familiar with the road. It was just an accident."

"Anybody hurt?"

"We took the kid to the hospital but he was released the next morning. He was a good swimmer and he got out by himself."

"Was he alone in the car?"

The question seemed to take Sheriff Largo by surprise. "Alone? Well, sure he was alone. He'd have told us if there was anybody else in there, wouldn't he?"

"But you never examined the wreck?"

"I told you, by the next morning it was under fifty feet of water! I notified the boy's parents and they said to leave it there."

Mike Trapper unfolded a map of the area. "Can you point out the spot where the accident occurred?"

"See, this is an old map. The reservoir covers these two roads now, and just about all of this here farm. But here's where the car went into the water — right here!" His finger jabbed at the map.

"I'm going to dive for it tomorrow," Mike told him. "Scuba dive. Are there any landmarks we could use to line up the spot?"

"Sure. See that silo up on the hill? If you line that up with the oak on the shore and go out just under a hundred feet, you should be right on top of it. You'll find a road under the water, and then an embankment. That's where the car should be."

"Thanks, Sheriff."

"Scuba diving, eh?" He walked over to his car and took out a briefcase. "Think I could sell you some insurance?"

BECAUSE IT WASN'T YET BEING USED TO SUPPLY THE CITY'S

water, pleasure boating was still allowed on the reservoir. We rented a boat at the local marina, where the owner was taking full advantage of a final summer's business. Then Mike got his scuba tanks and mask out of the car and checked over the gauges.

He stripped down to his swimming trunks and climbed into the boat while I got behind the wheel. He had a slim, muscular swimmer's body, and I could believe he'd done this sort of thing in college. It was good to be working on something like this with him. At my age it was no business for loners any more.

We took the boat out into the middle of the reservoir, lining it up with the silo and the oak tree as the sheriff had instructed. "Think this is about a hundred feet?" I asked. We didn't seem very far from shore at all.

"A bit closer in, I think. Distances are deceiving on the water."

I steered the boat toward shore, keeping it in line with our landmarks. Finally Mike told me to stop. "I'll go down and have a look." He slipped the mask over his face and turned on his air tanks. I helped him over the side and he disappeared into the murky gray water.

I sat behind the wheel, just drifting, wondering how long he'd be down there. The day had been sunny earlier, but now big white clouds had rolled in from the west, leaving only occasional spots of blue. They reminded me that autumn was coming. I looked around for other boats but there weren't too many on this weekday. Maybe people had gotten an early start moving their boats to other lakes before they were officially banned from Devon.

Mike's head broke the water about ten feet out from the boat. He took the breathing tubes from his mouth and shouted, "I've found it! I'm going down again."

"Want some tools?"

"Let me try the key first." Grange had given us a key to the trunk, but we didn't really think it would work after all this time. Mike confirmed it when he surfaced again moments later. "The key doesn't work. Pass me the hammer and crowbar."

I knew it would be difficult working under water, and Mike had even raised the possibility of using a torch to burn through the trunk, but neither of us knew how that might damage the contents we'd been hired to retrieve.

He'd been down again for a few minutes when I noticed a small motorboat speeding our way from the far shore. As it grew closer I saw there was a woman at the wheel, and she was coming my way. She cut the motor as she drew alongside, pushing her sunglasses up onto her brownish hair. Though I guessed her to be in her mid-forties, she'd

kept her shape well. In her striped T-shirt and white slacks she could have passed for much younger at a distance.

"Could I ask what you're doing here?"

"My friend's scuba diving," I answered casually.

"My name is Helen Grange. Does that mean anything to you?"

"Yes, I guess it does," I admitted. "I suppose you're Henry Grange's ex-wife."

"And you're working for Henry. I'm glad you admit it! Now what are you up to here?"

"I imagine you know that too. We're looking for the car your son ditched in the reservoir last September."

Her voice was grim as she said, "That car was mine as part of the divorce settlement. He has no right to go after it! I'm the one who told the sheriff to leave it there. He phoned me this morning and told me a couple of city people were snooping around."

"I wouldn't exactly call it snooping —"

"Just keep away from that car!"

"Your ex-husband says there's something valuable in the trunk that belongs to him."

"What — the Connecticut chest? Have you had the pleasure of meeting Miss Belle Engler of Stamford yet? He's had a new Connecticut chest to play with since last fall!"

"I'm just doing my job, Mrs. Grange."

Our eyes locked and she seemed about to pursue the battle, but somehow thought better of it. Instead she yanked the sunglasses down and started the engine. The boat took off at full throttle, spraying me with water.

Moments later Mike broke the surface again. "I saw another boat," he said. "Having a visitor?"

"The ex-Mrs. Grange. She told us to stay away from the car."

"Yeah?" He boosted himself over the side.

"Any luck with the trunk?"

"I got it open. It's empty."

WE WENT BACK TO SHORE AND I PHONED GRANGE AT HIS real estate office in the city. "The trunk is empty," I told him. "Sorry about that."

"Empty! I can't believe it!"

"If the chest wasn't in the car, where else might it be?"

"If it wasn't in the car that means Helen lied about it."

"She was out here while we were diving. She seemed very concerned about all the activity."

"Listen, you won't get anything out of her. I want you to talk to my son, Hank Junior. He just won't talk to me since the divorce and the accident. Ask him about the chest."

"All right," I agreed. "Where is he?"

"At college. Harwood. He stayed on this summer to take some extra courses. He starts his senior year next month."

"I'll take a run up and see him," I promised.

When I came out of the phone booth, Mike asked, "Are we out of a job?"

"No, he wants us to talk with his son up at Harwood."

"Does that need both of us?"

I thought about it and said, "No, why don't you stay here and talk to Sheriff Largo again. Ask him especially about anyone else who might have been interested in the car, and find out why he tipped Helen Grange off to our activities."

"OK."

"I'll pick you up back here around five o'clock."

THE CAMPUS OF HARWOOD COLLEGE, ABOUT AN HOUR'S drive beyond Devon Reservoir, was almost deserted as the end of the summer term drew near. Here and there a few students made their way along tree-lined walkways, but the vast parking lot was almost deserted in the early afternoon. Luckily there was a girl in the registration office to tell me that Henry Grange Jr. was residing at the Delta Kappa Phi fraternity house. She showed me how to get there on a campus map and I thanked her as I left.

The fraternity house was one of several on a block facing Panic River, the same river that had been diverted to enlarge the reservoir. Chairs, sofas and a rolled-up rug were piled in the front yard and I made my way past them to find three students in T-shirts and cut-off jeans painting the porch floor. "Is one of you Hank Grange?" I asked.

The sandy-haired one looked up, waving a gray-coated paint brush. "He's upstairs working on his thesis. But go around to the side door, will you? I don't want to have to repaint this again." He shouted up at an open second-floor window, "Hank! Visitor for you!"

I found my way inside and climbed the stairs to be met at the top by a lank hairy-chested man wearing faded jeans and nothing else. Grange had remarked that his son looked older than Mike Trapper and he was right. His dark complexion gave Hank Junior the appearance of a man of thirty.

"Al Darlan," I said, handing him my card. "I'm working for your father."

"What's he want with a private detective? The divorce is over."

"This is another matter. We're trying to recover a valuable antique chest for him. He had reason to believe it was in the car you drove into Devon Reservoir last September on the way back to school, but we checked that out this morning. The chest wasn't there."

"Checked it out how?" He walked back into his room.

"A scuba diver went down and took a look," I said, following along. His room, obviously shared with a fraternity brother during the regular school year, was cluttered with discarded clothing. A shirt hung over one chair, and a pair of tennis shoes with gray-mottled bottoms were upside-down on the floor. The walls were decorated with photos of campus activities. There was one of Grange in a track uniform and another of him high atop a small mountain of crates, lumber and old furniture. "What's this one?" I asked.

"Bonfire for a rally last fall, before the opening football game."

"I was always sorry I never went to college. I missed a good education."

"What is it you want with me?"

"Your dad wanted me to ask you about that chest. He seems to think you were bringing it back to campus the night of the accident."

"No, I don't know a thing about it. Did Mother tell him I took it?"

"That seems to be the idea."

He shook his head. "The two of them! Ever since the divorce they've been at each other, with me in the middle. That's why I stayed on campus this summer instead of going home. Whichever one I live with, the other gets furious."

"I understood you hadn't been speaking to your father."

"He hasn't phoned or written since the accident. Thinks I was high on pot or something when it happened. My God, I'd just left Mother's house a half-hour earlier! I went off the road in the dark."

"If you didn't take the chest, what do you think your mother did with it?"

"How should I know? Sold it, probably."

I glanced once more around the room, because I knew it was expected of me. He'd let me follow him in because he felt perfectly safe. I walked over and lifted the colorful Mexican blanket from some sort of table that was at the foot of one bed. Then I saw it wasn't a table but a drab green army foot locker. There was nothing at the foot of the other bed.

"Thanks for your help, Hank," I said. "Sorry to have bothered you."

"That's all right. I've been here all day working on this thesis

anyhow. I appreciate the break. Hope you find the chest."

"Things like that have a way of turning up sooner or later."

I left the campus and drove back the way I'd come, arriving at Devon and its reservoir about an hour later. Mike Trapper was waiting for me at a little lunch counter as we'd arranged, but I could see right away that something was wrong. "What is it, Mike?"

"Somebody killed Sheriff Largo. I found his body when I went to call on him."

I SAT DOWN HARD AND ORDERED A BEER. "WHAT HAPPENED? Tell me everything."

"Largo has his insurance office here in town, a little storefront on Main Street. I went there after you dropped me off. The door was open so I went in. He was in his private office, on the floor behind his desk. Somebody hit him on the head with a heavy metal bookend, then gave him a couple more raps to make sure. As soon as I found him I called the police and told them what little I knew. The state cops have been questioning me most of the time since then."

"They don't think you did it?" The thought suddenly alarmed me.

"No, but I figured I should tell them about the shooting I was involved in. They started bearing down with their questions after that, but I guess I finally satisfied them. Now they're questioning his secretary. She was out to lunch at the time he was killed, and they want to find out if he had any business enemies."

I took a sip of beer. "You think it's tied in with Grange and the missing chest?"

"I don't see how. Yet it's a pretty big coincidence, isn't it?"

"I don't like coincidences."

"How'd you make out with Hank Junior?"

I told him about our conversation, then added, "I want you to get a look at the accident report for the night Grange's car went into the reservoir. Think you can do it?"

"I can try."

"Maybe one of the deputies can help you. Slip him some bills if you have to."

"What about you?"

"Back to the city. I should talk to our client and report what's happened. Can you get back on your own?"

"Sure. Just remember my scuba gear's in your trunk."

"I'll remember."

"Think we'll ever find the Connecticut chest?"

"I know what happened to the chest. That's the least of my worries

right now."

IT WAS EARLY EVENING BY THE TIME I RETURNED TO THE city. Henry Grange lived in a penthouse apartment in one of the city's more fashionable sections. I figured it was costing him better than a thousand a month, and I wondered if he'd moved into it right after the divorce. Belle Engler answered my ring. She seemed surprised to see me.

"Mr. Darlan! Come in."

"Thank you. Is Henry around?"

"I haven't seen him all day. I think he's off inspecting the site for a new shopping plaza. Have you had any success?"

"The car's trunk was empty. I phoned Grange just before noon and he suggested I talk to his son at college. I just got back from there and I thought I'd report in."

"Did you find the chest?"

"No."

"Your partner did the diving, didn't he? We're paying for an extra diver."

"It's interesting that you know that," I said. "Mind telling me how you found out?"

"Henry's former wife called tonight. A real bitch! She went on about us hiring a couple of private eyes to dredge up that car. Said we were trying to cause trouble. I gathered she talked to you while Trapper was in the water."

"You didn't happen to be up that way yourself today, did you?"

"Why would I go up there?"

"Maybe you didn't trust us to turn over the chest." I glanced around at the tastefully furnished living room with its wide windows overlooking the darkening city. If I expected to see the chest, it wasn't there. "An odd thing happened up at Devon this noon. The sheriff up there, a man named Todd Largo, got himself killed. You wouldn't know anything about that, would you?"

"I never met the man. I think he phoned Henry some time after his son's accident."

"I see."

"You say someone killed him?"

My eyes flickered across her face. "No, Miss Engler, I said he got himself killed. That's all I said. But you're right, someone did kill him — with a metal bookend."

"How awful!"

"I'm sure he thought so too. Do you know anything about it?"

"Of course not! I told you I never met the man."

"Miss Engler, what is the nature of your business relationship with Henry Grange?"

"I don't think that's any of your business."

"If you won't answer me, perhaps you'll tell the police."

She walked to a low cocktail table and grabbed up an open pack of cigarettes. "Henry has a great respect for my business sense, that's all. He's given me an interest in some of his real estate developments."

"Has he ever considered taking his son into the business?"

"No, I don't believe that subject has ever come up."

"Thank you for your time," I said. "I'll be going now. Just tell Mr. Grange I stopped by."

"You can be sure I'll do that," she replied a bit sharply.

I drove back downtown to the office and found that Mike Trapper had returned ahead of me. "You made good time," I said, slipping out of my jacket. "What'd you find out?"

"Your hunch was right. There was an erasure on the accident report. The time was given as 6:35 p.m., but it looks as if Largo changed it from something else."

"The damned fool! That cost him his life."

"How'd you know that I should look at the accident report?"

"The timing was off," I explained. "Hank Junior left his mother's house at six to drive back to college. It's about a half-hour to the reservoir and another hour to the campus. But when Hank mentioned the accident today he let slip it was dark. Even in September it's not dark yet at 6:35. The car went into the reservoir some hours later than 6:35, after it was dark."

"How much later?"

I did some quick calculations in my mind. "It couldn't have been earlier than nine o'clock before he could drive back there."

Mike nodded. "Only the first figure had been erased and changed. A single digit figure. Could it have been 9:35?"

"Sounds about right. And I think somebody paid Sheriff Largo to move it up to 6:35. There aren't any houses on that road. It's doubtful there'd have been any witnesses. Remember, the road was under water by the following morning. Nobody'd have been strolling around there. I suppose it seemed like an innocent enough thing to Largo."

"But it wasn't innocent."

"No. Hank drove all the way to college that evening, probably without stopping. He would have arrived around 7:30. He unloaded the Connecticut chest and took it to his room. It would have been dark by

that time, and after he unloaded the chest something happened. Something involving the car, which makes me suspect a hit-and-run accident. Whatever it was, the car was damaged in such a way as to implicate Hank Grange if it was found. He must have remembered seeing signs at the reservoir about the water diversion and enlargement project the next day and it probably seemed like the perfect burial ground for the car. He drove it back to the reservoir, ditched it in fairly shallow water, and let it be covered over. Of course the records had to show this accident as occurring before the one on campus, so Sheriff Largo was persuaded or bribed to change the time of it on his report."

"By whom?"

"I think we can make a good guess on that. The young man's parents are the most likely, but it couldn't have been his father. Henry Grange hired us to get the chest from the trunk of the car. If he knew about the change in accident times, then he'd have known that his son reached the campus and had an opportunity to unload the chest. He hired us because he believed his son's story. That makes it Mrs. Grange who bribed Largo."

"And she was up there this morning about the time of the killing."

"That's right," I agreed. "Let's go see her."

Mike went over to kneel by the iron safe. "I'd better take my .38 along."

"No," I cautioned. "The cops will never let you forget you killed a man once. Leave it here."

"Think we should check on that possible hit-and-run accident?"

"I think she'll be ready to tell us all about it."

As we were going downstairs Mike asked me, "What makes you so sure, Al? How do you know he got to the campus with that chest?"

"Because he's got a picture in his room at the fraternity house. It shows him on top a big pile of wood and junk being built for a bonfire last fall. He's standing right next to the Connecticut chest. I recognized the carved tulip decorations his father mentioned. Since the chest was supposed to be in the car he couldn't keep it in his room at college very long. He burned it on the bonfire for the opening football game."

HELEN GRANGE STILL RESIDED IN THE BIG SUBURBAN RANCH home she'd shared with her husband. I approached the double front doors with some trepidation after our encounter on the reservoir earlier in the day, but when she opened the door she hardly seemed surprised to see us.

"Well, it's Mr. Darlan, isn't it?"

"That's right. And my partner, Mike Trapper."

"A bit late for a social call, isn't it?" The moon had just risen behind a line of trees in her back yard.

"I didn't think it should wait until morning."

She ushered us into a large sunken living room with white carpeting and twin sofas the color of port wine. "Now then — what is it that's so urgent?"

I told her about the murder of Todd Largo. I told her about my visit to her son, and the picture on his wall that had led to my conclusions about the accident. In short, I told her everything I'd told Mike earlier. She listened to it all without changing expression. Finally she asked, "Just what is the purpose of your visit?"

"I think you persuaded Sheriff Largo to change the time on his accident report. And I think that's why he was murdered today."

In that moment her face changed, and once again she was the angry grim woman who'd faced me on the reservoir that morning. "Are you saying I killed him?"

"I'm saying you had both motive and opportunity."

"Who would that convince?"

I decided to play my last card. Leaning forward on the sofa I said, "Let's face it, Mrs. Grange. Either you take the rap for this or your son does. They're not going to forget about a sheriff getting beaten to death in his office."

"Why do you keep bringing Hank into this? Is it some plot of my ex-husband's to strike back at me?"

"I couldn't keep Hank out even if I wanted to, Mrs. Grange. Suppose you tell me about the hit-and-run accident that started it all."

"You're guessing now."

"Mike here could check the records first thing in the morning. I'm sure there weren't too many accidents on or near the Harwood campus that night."

She backed off a bit then, and said, "There was a girl, a freshman from Stamford who'd only been on campus a week. She wasn't familiar with the traffic flow. She stepped off the curb right in front of his car. He panicked and kept going."

"Is that the way he told it?"

"Yes, and I believe him. He drove back down to the reservoir and ditched the car. Under the circumstances I might have done the same thing."

I shook my head. "No, you wouldn't. You don't impress me as the sort who panics easily. You paid Sheriff Largo to change the time on that accident report, didn't you?"

"I didn't bribe him, if that's what you mean. As a matter of fact, he was supposed to close off that road at sundown in preparation for the following morning's flooding. I pointed this out to him and he agreed it would be better for all concerned if the accident was recorded as having taken place around 6:30."

"So you were doing him a favor."

"In a sense, yes."

"Was it a favor when he had his head bashed in?"

"I didn't —"

"I know you didn't, but your son did. He was very careful to set up an alibi when I visited him today, telling me he'd been in his room writing a thesis all morning. But there was gray paint on the bottoms of his shoes, where he'd walked on the freshly painted front porch of the fraternity house. One of the painters cautioned me to go around the back because they didn't want to repaint it *again*. You see, they had to repaint it after Hank came in, after he returned from killing Largo."

That was when we saw him, coming in from the kitchen with a long-barrelled target pistol pointed at us. Helen Grange was on her feet. "Hank, you fool! Stay back!"

Mike Trapper saw him and went for his own gun, then remembered I'd told him not to bring it. Hank Grange kept on coming, a wild look in his eyes, holding the pistol straight out in front of him. "You're not sending me to prison!" he shouted. "Killing Largo was an accident!"

"Put down the gun and we'll talk about it," I suggested calmly.

Mike dove for the outstretched arm, knocking it aside as the pistol fired. There was a shattering of glass behind me and then Helen Grange was trying to pull Mike off her son. The gun flew free and she moved to grab it up. I tried to move fast myself, but she fired into the tussling bodies a split-second before I reached her.

For a moment I didn't know which of them she'd hit. There was blood on both their shirts.

Then Mike rolled Hank Grange off him and stood up. "You'd better call an ambulance," he said.

Helen started screaming and I took the gun away from her before she could correct her mistake. It had been one hell of a day.

IT WAS NEARLY MIDNIGHT BEFORE I GOT AROUND TO REPORTING to Henry Grange. Belle Engler served us coffee while I went over the day's events with him. "Helen phoned your son as soon as she heard from Largo that we were diving for the car," I said. "Hank drove down there from the college and Largo got nervous about having

changed the accident time. He threatened your son and Hank hit him with a bookend. Then he drove back to the college, arriving shortly before I did."

"I should be at the hospital," he said quietly when I'd finished.

"Mike Trapper is there now, with the police. The doctors say Hank will pull through, but the story's out. Helen is telling the whole thing. She went all to pieces after she shot him."

"My God — how could this happen to my family?"

"It isn't your family any more," Belle reminded him. "Only your son."

He left for the hospital then, and I stayed on drinking coffee with Belle. "He's awfully pale," she said. "I hope he'll be all right."

I took a sip of coffee. "It was your idea to hire the scuba diver, wasn't it? Henry said yesterday that you convinced him it was foolish to let the chest rot there."

"When he told me about the chest I was naturally curious. I wanted to rescue it if we could."

"But you didn't need private detectives for that. And we were your idea too, weren't we? Henry said that too."

"What are you getting at?" she asked cautiously.

"The college girl killed by Hank's car was from Stamford. And Mrs. Grange told me you're from Stamford too. I've always hated coincidences."

"What does that mean?"

"You met Grange last fall, which would have been after the accident. I think you arranged to meet him."

"You're a wise man, Mr. Darlan," she said after a moment's hesitation. "The dead girl was my niece, and I loved her like a daughter. I wanted the person who killed her brought to justice. The police closed the case but I decided to keep it open. That accident at the reservoir the same night interested me, so I arranged to meet the family. What happened then was the real thing, though. I fell in love with Henry."

"But you kept after his son, getting him to hire detectives to search for the chest, knowing that was the weak link in Hank's story."

She looked down at her coffee. "I didn't know it would end like this," she said softly.

"I guess the case is closed now," I said, standing up. "Are you going to tell Henry?"

"Maybe someday."

"Good luck, Miss Engler," I said as I went out. "We'll mail our bill."

I go down by the lake to see the big snake that Mama calls a cottonmouth. But I like the marsh better. It's more fun — and more dangerous!

MAMA'S DARLING

by DICK STODHILL

MAMA CALLS ME HER DARLING. IT'S KIND OF BABYISH SINCE I'm eight years old but I like it. She called me that last night because I was late for supper and she was worried. She might not have if she knew I was down in the marsh.

Mama doesn't want me to go down in the marsh. She says it's a bad place and a little girl could get hurt. That's stupid because I go there all the time ever since the day last summer when I followed Billy Johnson and Tommy Syphert. I saw them going down the path between our house and Mrs. Edgecomb's. That's where the marsh really starts, only it's just a little stream that comes from a pipe under the street.

I don't like Billy Johnson because he made a face at me and said girls aren't allowed down in the marsh. He and Tommy Syphert tried to chase me but I followed them anyway.

Billy Johnson was on our street all morning today when the police cars were there looking for Mrs. Edgecomb's husband. He was nice today because I know Mrs. Edgecomb and told him about her and her husband and he thought it was funny because Mrs. Edgecomb lost her cat last week and lost her husband yesterday. We laughed and he gave me a bite of his candy bar so I guess I like him better than I did the day I followed him down to the marsh.

He didn't even know I was following him and neither did Tommy Syphert until after they passed the first big tree where the path ends and you come to the tall grass. You have to turn left and the path is

there again but not as wide as before. Then you follow it to another big tree and the path ends for good.

That's where Billy Johnson saw me and started acting stupid. He said girls can't go to the marsh because they don't know how to do things like that and would sink in the quicksand.

"It's right over there," he said, "and you are so dumb you would walk right in it if I hadn't told you because it looks like the path goes right there but there isn't a path any more so it fools you."

I didn't believe him because everybody knows Billy Johnson is a liar. Even the teacher because she caught him. I watched him and he went to the big tree and so did Tommy Syphert. They turned real close to it and went that way.

WHEN THEY WERE GONE I WENT TO THE BIG TREE AND looked at where Billy Johnson said it was quicksand. It didn't look any different to me so I found a rock and threw it there and it sank. I found a bigger rock and threw it there and it sank too so I thought maybe it was quicksand.

Then I followed Billy Johnson and Tommy Syphert again. If you looked real close you could see where they walked because it's kind of wet and makes footprints.

After you go a long way you come to a lake with trees growing in it. I went back then because there was a big snake like mama is afraid of. The kind that opens its mouth real wide and is all white and ugly inside. I threw a rock at it because mama said its name is a cottonmouth snake. But mama yells even when she sees a little garter snake and says it is a cottonmouth snake.

When I went back I threw another rock and it sank too. I wanted something bigger but there wasn't anything except a big stick. I threw it and it just laid there so I thought maybe it really wasn't quicksand and Billy Johnson was telling another lie.

ALL THE TIMES I WENT DOWN IN THE MARSH I TOOK SOMETHING to throw there. Sometimes they sank and sometimes they just laid there like the stick but the next time I would go they were gone. But that didn't prove it was quicksand until last week.

Mama doesn't like Mrs. Edgecomb's cat named Iva because she says it eats birds. I never saw it eat a bird but I don't like Iva because she raises her back and makes a funny sound when you walk by her.

Last week when I went down to the marsh Mrs. Edgecomb's cat Iva was on the path trying to eat a bird. I made a noise and the bird flew away. Iva turned her head and looked at me but she didn't run like she

usually does. I grabbed Iva and held her way out because she was kicking her legs and making a funny sound. I had a rubber ball to throw where Billy Johnson said it was quicksand but I dropped it and threw Iva.

It was funny. She couldn't get her legs out and she kept moving around and making a real funny sound and all the time she kept getting lower and lower. Pretty soon just her head was there and she quit making the funny sound and looked at me and then she was gone. I guess Billy Johnson wasn't telling a lie this time.

Mrs. Edgecomb and her husband Mr. Edgecomb looked all over for Iva but they couldn't find her. It was funny because I knew where she was. I couldn't tell because mama would be mad if she knew. I was down in the marsh:

I don't like Mrs. Edgecomb's husband because he is mean and always is working in his yard. He gets mad if you step on his grass and he yelled and chased me the day my ball rolled in his yard. He is just like Mr. Kincaid who lives across the street and always is working in his yard and gets mad if you go on it. I go on it when he isn't looking.

YESTERDAY I WAS GOING DOWN TO MARY ELLEN'S HOUSE. Mr. Edgecomb was mowing his lawn so I asked him if he found his cat Iva and laughed. He stopped mowing his lawn and his face was red so he got a big handkerchief out of his pocket and wiped it. He kept looking at me but didn't say anything so I said, "I know where your cat is right now but I won't tell you."

He said some things and I said some things and then he said, "I will give you a piece of candy if you tell me where Iva is," so I said, "Come with me and I will show you where Iva is."

Mr. Edgecomb followed me to where the big trees are so mama can't see me go down to the marsh. He followed me along the stream to the first big tree and we turned left and were walking to the next big tree when he got mad and said, "I will beat the hell out of you if you are leading me on a goose chase."

I don't know what a goose chase is but he was mad so I stuck my tongue out at him and put my thumbs in my ears and waved my fingers at him like Billy Johnson does. He started to chase me so I ran to the big tree and jumped behind it just before he caught me. But Mr. Edgecomb didn't turn left like you are supposed to but went straight ahead and right away was up to his knees.

It was funny because he waved his arms around and said, "My God," and pretty soon he was almost up to his belt. I was laughing but he said, "My God, please help me," but how could I help him?

Besides he was up over his belt by then and he kept saying, "My god," and, "Please go get somebody," and, "Please run fast."

I didn't want to go because he would have been clear gone by the time I got back. And besides, then mama would have found out I was down in the marsh.

Mr. Edgecomb put his arms out flat but they went too and when it got up to his neck he put his head back and didn't ask me to go any more. He kept saying, "Oh, my God," over and over until it went in his mouth and then he kind of looked back at me over the top of his head with his eyes and then they were gone too.

I went on down by the lake with the trees in it. The cottonmouth snake was there again but he squiggled away like he was afraid of me. On the way back I found a big rock and threw it and wondered if it went on top of Mr. Edgecomb's head.

That's why I was late for supper and mama was worried. She put her arms around me and said, "Thank God. Where has Mama's Darling been?"

ALL DAY THE POLICE CARS HAVE BEEN ON OUR STREET LOOKING for Mrs. Edgecomb's husband. Once I saw Mrs. Edgecomb out in her yard talking to them and twisting her handkerchief around and crying. I thought about telling but I couldn't because then mama would have found out I was down in the marsh. I would have been in trouble and she wouldn't have made the popcorn and brought it out on the porch so we could sit on the swing and eat it.

She said, "Why is Mama's Darling so quiet?" but I didn't answer her because I was watching Mr. Kincaid mow his lawn across the street. I wonder if he ever goes down in the marsh? ●



The Pentacle was a secret society that hadn't met in ten years, but now they were together again — for a deadly purpose!

THE FIVE SIDES OF MURDER

by HAL CHARLES

THE BELLS SEEMED TO BE RINGING AT THE END OF A LONG, dark tunnel. Carey bolted upright in his bed. Shaking his head, he looked at his watch. Twelve o'clock. Of course. Carefully he listened, and, as he had feared since receiving the letter, the bells in the chapel tower at Haven College were indeed sounding.

But not for midnight. Instead they tolled in the familiar sequence of fives. Five rings. Five seconds of silence. Five rings, and so on until the five sets of five were complete.

Carey knew he should disregard the summons and take the next plane back to New York, but as if compelled by some strange force, he threw on his slacks and windbreaker, then took the large paper bag from his suitcase.

The fall night held a penetrating chill. The wind picked up as Carey strode purposefully across the darkened campus. He wished he had listened to Helen and brought a heavier coat.

Since he had graduated in 1970, this was his first trip back. Helen, whom he had met in graduate school at Columbia, had always been curious about what the *Wall Street Journal* called "the academic center for liberal thought in middle America," but the poignant memories of his senior year had always caused him to put off going back to Haven. Until last week, until the mail had brought the familiar five-sided key he had tried so unsuccessfully to forget. Carey was glad that his wife had been tied up in New York with the store's spring fashion show. After all, she had not been a part of his life then, and there were things she was better off not knowing.

Here he was, the heir to one of America's largest newspaper chains, fitting quite comfortably into his three-piece Brooks Brothers suit and

conservative lifestyle. Was it really that long ago that he had sat in the third floor office of the campus newspaper, his long hair falling on his fatigue jacket, pounding out editorials against the various injustices committed by the very corporate structures, the dreaded Establishment, that he was now so firmly a part of?

EARLIER IN THE DAY WHEN HE HAD REGISTERED IN ALUMNI Hall he heard a voice from beneath the WELCOME, CLASS OF 70 banner call out, "Radical Jack."

Carey turned to see the outstretched hand of Ralph Peabody, the class agent who still had the smile of a used-car salesman. "You," Peabody said, "are the last person on earth I'd have thought would co-opt."

"Times change," Carey replied, avoiding the comment. "Hey, where's the class meeting?"

"Follow me, man."

The Washburn Room where Carey was led teemed with men and women who, despite their heavier bodies and thinning hair, were doing their best to call back the late Sixties. The roaches and beer cans had been replaced by Havana cigars and beerbellies, but from the conversational gaps, the forced small-talk, and the vacant, shifting gazes, Carey could sense the strain.

No more at home than the rest, he circulated through the crowd with a "Good to see you" here, a nod there, and an occasional "Whatever happened to . . ." question. He wondered if all reunions were so affected, or if it were just a malaise peculiar to his generation. Then, just as the background music changed from "Everything is Beautiful" to "Bridge Over Troubled Waters," Carey spotted Abe Green, the successful lawyer whom the chain's political columnists claimed was just a step away from an important judgeship. Momentarily his eyes locked with the tall man who still looked like he could captain Haven's basketball team, then turned away.

Uneasy, Carey found an empty corner window and preoccupied himself with staring across the leaf-covered lawn. Suddenly the rich harmonies of Simon and Garfunkel were interrupted by the unmistakable bullhorn of Horton Chambers, now a key member of the House Finance Committee. Making sure that the congressman could not see his face, Carey shuffled away through the crowd and to the bar.

He had just gotten his second scotch and water — a double — when he saw the gaunt figure of Burton Steppe appear in the doorway. Carey felt he was trapped in a haunted house with the ghosts of his past seemingly appearing from nowhere.

Having spotted the government troubleshooter, who was strongly rumored to have organized several covert intelligence operations in South America, Carey knew it inevitable that he would soon encounter Larry Rush. And, as though the mere thinking of the man's name had caused it, the boy genius of microchip technology materialized by the stone fireplace at the end of the room.

Despite their collective vow, each one had returned.

His purpose in coming to the cocktail party complete, Carey had returned to the Matthew Haven Hotel. Although overcome by the fatigue from his long flight, Carey had been unable to sleep. Everytime he closed his eyes, he saw a huge key. On each of its edges perched the face of one of the four men from his past.

The fifth side held his image.

A GUST OF DAMP WIND BROUGHT CAREY BACK TO THE present and his late-night purpose. Pulling his collar up, he glanced at the now silent belltower.

Cobb Chapel was open just as Matthew Haven's will had stipulated it must be twenty-four hours a day. He entered the building, climbed the staircase to the loft, and started up the ladder to the belltower. Halfway up he paused. In the dim light he could barely make out the tiny door to the left of the ladder. He inserted the key and turned it.

The other four were already sitting in the candlelit room. With their robes on and their hoods up, they looked like an assemblage of monks. From the bag Carey withdrew the purple garment, donned it, and pulled the cowl over his head. And when he had sat in the remaining chair, the pentagon-shaped table was filled.

Taking the taper in his hand, Carey saluted the five sides of the room. Even after ten years he hadn't forgotten the invocation: "In the name of the Pentacle, the endless knot that binds us all, and of the perfection of the five fives that were sacred to Arthur and his court, I call into creation this solemn convocation."

Setting the taper in the center of the table, next to a blank brown envelope that Carey assumed belonged to one of his four associates, he placed his key on the wax-covered brass holder. "I beseech thee," he called out, "who among you hath issued the summons?"

One by one they placed their keys on the holder, each in turn replying, "Not I."

As the last of the keys was returned to the holder, silence prevailed. Carey was shocked.

In the past whenever one of the Pentacle had an urgent matter demanding action, he used the signal of the bells to assemble the

group. But that was before the incident, before they had agreed never to meet again, before they had left their keys in this very room. That's why when he had received the pentagon-shaped object he was so fearful, and now the shock had been magnified as none of his fellow members would admit to calling the meeting.

THE PENTACLE HAD ALWAYS BEEN A SECRET SOCIETY, AND unlike other campus groups that perpetuated their membership, the five of them had formed the society in their junior years and had been its only members. Because of their purpose they had sworn each other to secrecy, and up to this moment Carey would have bet his life that the secret had never been betrayed.

"I don't know about the rest of you," interrupted a coarse voice. Everybody looked to Carey's right as Horton Chambers threw his cowl back over his shoulders. "But I don't find any of this funny."

"Neither do I," said Abe Green pushing his curly black hair off his forehead. "Can you think what it would do to any of our reputations if we were spotted, a bunch of grown men sitting around a candlelit table like hooded idiots."

"We didn't think we were idiots ten years ago." Burton Steppe pounded his hand on the table as he always had to emphasize a point.

Larry Rush uncovered his head. "Like the rest of you I was scared what the key in the mail might lead to. If ten years ago we'd told the truth, it would have saved a lot of sleepless nights."

Carey spoke up. "I've thought about our vow of silence a great deal over the years. Maybe this is a second chance for us. When we formed this group, we had ideals. They were good ideals."

"But," said Steppe, "that day in May changed everything."

AS HE LOOKED INTO STEPPE'S SUNKEN FACE, CAREY HAD A momentary vision of that hot August night in 1968 when an even thinner Steppe had talked some of Haven College's more prominent and outspoken liberal students into meeting him at Cobb Chapel. Earlier that summer they had experienced the singeing disappointment, the disillusionment with the political process at the Democratic Convention. Returning from Chicago, they had dedicated themselves to changing an unresponsive process that had failed the dreams of so many.

And so the campus newspaper editor, the student body president, a future valedictorian, a basketball star, and the chairman of the college's Honor Court had banded together. Steppe, in the process of researching a history project on the school's activist founder, had

come across an 1857 letter written by Haven himself making reference to the underground railroad system used to bring slaves up from the South to freedom. One of the stopover points had been Cobb Chapel. Determined, Steppe had searched until he had found a secret room mentioned in the letter. That August night he had shown the group his discovery and had given each of them one of the five keys that Haven and his nineteenth-century liberals had left behind when their underground was no longer necessary. They also adopted the name and the ritualistic trappings of Haven's secret society.

To everyone else on campus, they were just isolated leaders. The group was careful not to socialize so that they could not be connected. Their strength lay in the fact that no one knew they were working together. As federal authorities had been paying informers to infiltrate radical groups, they thought it best to avoid public attention. After all, in the years following the assassinations of the Kennedys and Dr. King the country had developed a paranoia over conspiracies. Their major purpose was simple — to make everyone at Haven College as politically aware as possible. Individually they wrote editorials on the war in Southeast Asia, staged rallies against the draft, campaigned against ROTC being allowed to remain on campus, and brought in speakers ranging from a liberal senator to a fist-raising Black Panther. But though they had indoctrinated the student body and Haven's administration had been one of the first to cancel military research, the group wanted more. There had to be something to focus *national* attention on the abuses of a government involved in an illegal foreign war.

"GENTLEMEN," SAID STEPPE, INTERRUPTING CAREY'S reverie, "I think we realize we have a problem here. If none of us called the meeting, our security has been breached."

"May I suggest then that we look at that." Chambers pointed to the brown envelope in the center of the table.

Carey picked it up and undid the clasp. Inside he found a yellowed newspaper photograph attached to a scrap of paper on which a message had been typed. He read it aloud: "FOR YOUR PART IN THIS, YOU WILL ALL BE MADE TO PAY."

Carey set the picture down in the center of the table. In the flickering candlelight, he could see the taut, lined faces reliving the horror of that day in May. Ten years of forgetting were wiped away by the grainy shot of the angry students with their placards, the National Guard with their M-1s drawn, and in the middle the lifeless figure of a blond girl stretched beneath the cold, white statue of Matthew Haven.

"My God," said Green, "someone *does* know."

"How could they?" returned Rush. "Surely none of us would have been foolish enough to tell anybody. Abe and I don't even have wives to tell. What about the rest of you?"

As each in turn denied any leak, Carey's mind slipped backward, back to May 1, 1970, two days after Nixon had ordered troops into Cambodia. The rocks, the shouts . . . the bullets.

"The note says we'll have to pay," said Rush. "What does that mean?"

"Obviously," answered the congressman, "we have a blackmailer, but what I wonder is, how much can he prove?"

"If he knows about the Pentacle," said Carey, "he must know a great deal more."

"Where do you suggest we go from here?" asked Steppe, lighting up a pipe.

Carey answered, "I have a feeling someone has this all planned out. There's not much we can do here but worry or get caught. I suggest we go back to our rooms and do the only thing we can — wait."

CAREY STARED DOWN AT THE COLD EGGS AND TOAST WITHOUT seeing them. He had probably slept less than an hour as his mind had darted between the past and the present.

"John, John!"

Carey looked up to see a flushed Ralph Peabody rushing across the hotel dining room toward him. "Did you hear about Burton Steppe?"

"No. What happened?"

"Campus Security found him in his room at Alumni House this morning. Another guest smelled gas, and when they broke into Burton's room, they found him sprawled on the bed."

"Dead." It just wouldn't register in Carey's mind, and for a split-second, he heard gunshots and then a voice, "*It's Carol. Oh no! They've shot her!*"

"All the windows were shuttered and the gas heater was wide open."

The waiting was over sooner than he had expected, Carey decided. But had Burton turned the gas on himself out of some sense of guilt, or had the unknown notewriter made him pay with something other than money?

SATURDAY NIGHT CAREY RANG THE BELLS. THIS TIME THE group convened without ritual or robes. Their tired, shocked faces reminded Carey of how they looked ten years ago at what they believed would be their last meeting.

The discussion centered around the death of Burton Steppe. As they had done in so many crisis situations in the past, the group studied their options — should they leave campus immediately or stay? In his best courtroom manner Abe Green pointed out that any sudden departure might well implicate them in the killing of their friend. Larry Rush objected. Spitting out words had no definite proof of foul play and that Steppe might have taken his own life — hadn't he had reason enough? Horton Chambers proclaimed that they had been fools to come there in the first place. Now, regardless of whether Steppe's death was suicide or murder, their best tact was flight. Surely no authorities were going to suspect such solid citizens of something so sordid.

Carey slowly picked up the yellowed photograph that still lay on the table. "Gentlemen, I think you're forgetting something. A friend of ours is dead, and ultimately we must all accept some responsibility for it."

"Hold it. Wait a minute," blustered Chambers. "You're not suggesting that one of us . . ."

"What I'm saying is that either way Burton's death is a result of this." Carey pointed to the prostrate blond beneath the statue of Matthew Haven. "Carol Webb's being shot."

"But we didn't want it to happen that way," protested Chambers.

"The fact remains it happened. I shouldn't have to remind you that when American troops were ordered into Cambodia we saw the chance to get the national attention we had so long sought. What could be more powerful publicity, we decided, than an actual confrontation between students and the National Guard. So we planned it all. The student strike, the heated editorials, the posters, and finally the fire at the ROTC building. All engineered for one purpose. We knew that the right-wing governor of this state would have a kneejerk reaction and call out the Guard. What we didn't know was that he'd give them live ammunition, that they'd overreact, and that a girl would die."

CAREY STARED ACROSS THE HOTEL ROOM AT THE LUMINOUS clock dial. It read 2:27. He tried closing his eyes, but every time he did he saw the blond girl's head jerk around as if called by a friend, then drop to the warm spring grass. The red ran across her forehead, staining the daisies and black-eyed susans she had woven through her hair.

For a moment Carey thought he heard steps coming down the hall toward him, but then there was silence. A board creaked outside his door. Who would be up at this time of night? He started to pick up the

telephone, but that would seem foolish if the footsteps belonged to a bellboy or a guest returning from a late-night reunion party.

"Who's there?" he called from behind the locked door.

No answer.

Summoning his strength, Carey jerked the door open.

A red-eyed Larry Rush stood leaning against the frame.

"John, I'm sorry. I didn't . . ." he said haltingly. "Can I come in? I've got to talk to somebody."

As he shut the door, Carey noticed his visitor was carrying a leather valise. "Can I fix you a drink?"

"Please," Larry replied, setting the valise down beside him.

A bit uneasy with his late-night guest, Carey went to the bathroom for the bourbon bottle. All the while he listened for any movement in the bedroom. Had things gotten so bad he was suspicious of a friend?

"John, I know that the members of the Pentacle were by design never tight. In fact, most of us were loners, never close to anyone then or now. I don't know about you back then, but I felt we gave up a lot of ourselves for the cause, maybe more than we should have."

"Hearts with one purpose alone through summer and winter seem enchanted to a stone."

"What's that?"

"William Butler Yeats on the Irish revolutionaries."

"Yeah, I guess it fits. We've all borne a big burden these last few years, but mine has been a little heavier."

His guest stood up suddenly as Carey returned with the two glasses of bourbon. Slowly Carey held out one of the drinks. "I don't understand," he admitted.

"Carol Webb and I were in love."

"What?" The bourbon caught in Carey's throat, both burning and choking him.

"We didn't broadcast it, but it started when Carol and I had a political theory class together. Her head was all messed up. She'd been a cheerleader, was going heavy with some jock, then got into Lysistrata. You remember, the feminist group. Well, anyway, she chucked the whole Miss American Pie scene — and after an angry breakup with her boyfriend, we sort of . . . got together. We were really happy. I mean, two kids with common causes." He paused to take a sip. "We even made that placard together she was carrying when . . ."

"Why didn't you tell us, Larry?"

"What could you have done? It's like Horton said earlier tonight: sometimes things don't turn out the way you plan. I wish the whole

thing had never happened. I never meant it to”

“None of us did.”

“The pressure’s gotten too much, John, what with Burton actually dying. I don’t know how much longer I can take it.” He put his empty glass down and rose. “Look, I’m keeping you up.” He walked to the door, then abruptly turned and rushed toward a surprised Carey.

He threw his arms around his old friend and buried his head in his shoulder. Then, just as suddenly he lifted his solitary frame and rushed out.

Carey shut the door slowly. He knew it would be his second night without much sleep.

WHEN GRANT LIBRARY OPENED AT 8:00 THE NEXT MORNING, Carey went down to the microfilm room. If someone had asked him why he wanted to read the local paper for May 2, 1970, he couldn’t have said exactly, but the events of the last few days had forced him back into the past.

For the few minutes he sat looking at the pictures and articles, he lost all awareness of Helen, his business associates, even the library. It was May first. He was sitting on the grassy slopes in black and white. In the midst of the bluejeaned students and their anti-war signs, he spotted Larry standing just to the left of Ralph Peabody and to the right of Carol Webb. Why hadn’t he noticed that before? And in another photo Larry stood near Horton. Still another showed Burton, perched on the statue — one arm linked with that of the metal figure of Matthew Haven and the other shaking a fist in the direction of some hazy Guardsmen.

Even the uniformed soldiers fascinated him. Some pictures showed them sitting around smoking, apparently unaware of what was about to take place. Certainly not the green menace they had seemed then. What faces Carey could make out were young, almost child-like. One group played cards. A tall kid with long black hair jutting out from under his helmet stood with his back indifferently toward the student mob. He might have been a student himself, a weekend warrior who had forgotten to get his monthly haircut. Another group stood waving at some coeds in skin-tight t-shirts.

Cranking the machine’s roller moved Carey from edenic tranquility to chaos. Faces contorted in fury. Obscene hand gestures. Green uniforms in formation. Rifles lifted. A lifeless girl.

His pulse racing, Carey fled. Up some stairs and into a cold drizzle. Running, trying to outrace his heart. Faces and buildings blurred. In the distance he heard a siren. Flashing blue and red lights caught

his attention.

He paused. A small crowd had gathered in front of Cobb Chapel. Carey moved toward them, watching as campus police directed an orange ambulance across the wet grass. He pushed his way through the growing crowd, half-knowing what he was going to find.

On the concrete beneath the belltower lay the twisted body of Larry Rush. His face looked pale, but almost at peace.

A powerful hand grabbed Carey's shoulder. "Usually you find out these things in the last page of the alumni magazine. Necrology, isn't it? I find it a lot easier that way."

Carey turned to the corpulent face of Ralph Peabody.

"Gets to you, doesn't it, John? Say, weren't you friends or something with Rush? What was it — your sophomore, your junior year?"

Carey felt cold, even colder than the damp air and crisp wind could account for.

"Ten years ago," continued Peabody, "I was on the outside looking in. Now I get my big chance to be part of something, to be a leader"

Almost numb, Carey turned without hearing the last words and walked away. Larry Rush had come to him not six hours ago, a very troubled man, and all he'd been able to offer was a glass of bourbon.

CAREY'S ROOM AT THE HOTEL WASN'T ANY WARMER. HE threw on a sweater and sat down in the very chair Larry had occupied. How had what began as such a noble cause cost three good people their lives?

His eye noticed what he had been too tired to spot the night before. When Larry had run out of the room, he'd left behind his leather valise. Carey stared at it. The clasp was undone. Without thinking, he opened it.

The only thing inside was a handwritten letter. It was addressed to him:

John,

I know that when I talk to you tonight I won't be able to tell you this. In my whole life the only person I was ever able to talk with was Carol. And she's gone. That's what this weekend is all about.

I lived so long with her death. Over the years I've managed to convince myself that the rest of the Pentacle should suffer as I have. So I sent

those letters a week ago. I rang the bells Friday night. And I wrote the letter saying you'd all have to pay.

I only meant to scare you a little, to make you feel some guilt like I had. I didn't mean for anyone to die.

What can I do? I find it even harder to live with myself now.

Your friend,
Larry

So that's what had driven him to jump. There was only one thing left for Carey to do.

MORE AWARE OF THE TWO EMPTY SPACES AT THE PENTAGONAL table than the two men who were there, Carey held up Rush's letter as he explained what had to be done.

"There's no question about it anymore. We've got to tell the truth right now, to admit to our responsibility."

"I don't know about Abe," said Chambers without his customary resonance, "but I'm willing to suffer any consequences to get some peace of mind."

Abe Green stood up slowly, making Carey aware of his height. "This whole thing has gotten out of hand, and it needs to be tied up now. The night this business started I thought I'd have to deal with only one person — Larry. Then Burton told me after our Friday night meeting to come by his room so I figured he had to be the one who set the whole thing up. He admitted not only that because of some recent activities in South America he was *persona non grata* in the intelligence community, but also some angry dictator had put a price on his head. He needed money. Said he had done some snooping, and he knew what had really happened ten years ago."

"Why were you so sure that Larry had sent the keys?" said Chambers.

"And what," added Carey, "did Burton know?"

Abe propped a lanky leg upon an empty chair. "Larry and Carol Webb, the blond in the pictures, were lovers."

Like a photo in a developing tray, a fuzzy picture was starting to form in Carey's mind.

"She was mine first," said Green.

Carey snapped his fingers. "The jock. The angry breakup."

"That's right. Things were good between us till she became a bra-

burner. I told her I didn't care how much her consciousness had been raised, she wasn't going to up and leave me just like that. I'd make her sorry if she tried."

"And you did." Carey spat out the words before he had time to think. "You weren't with the rest of us that day." He remembered the pictures in the library. Abe had been the only one who hadn't shown up in any of them, unless . . .

"I had something else to do."

"The tall Guardsman with the long hair."

"Your little scenario made it easy for me. The uniform I took from some guy in the dorm, and back then picking up a surplus M-1 was as easy as getting a Saturday Night Special. When the students charged and the Guard got the command to fire over their heads, I just aimed a little lower."

"My God," exclaimed Chambers, "I've never heard of anything so callous."

Green's face grew rigid. "The whole affair would have been dead ten years ago if Burton and Larry had forgotten it like the rest of us."

"So you murdered them," said Carey.

Green reached beneath his gray suitcoat. "This room has kept its secrets for over one hundred and twenty years. I guess it'll hold a few more." Encircled in Green's fingers, Carey could see the metal butt. Instinctively he kicked out at the chair on which Green's foot rested. Halfway out of its holster, the gun exploded as its owner lost his balance.

Green pitched forward across the table, his head coming to rest next to the yellowed photo.

THE THREE OF THEM STOOD BESIDE THE SUNDRENCHED statue.

"That's some story you told the police," said Peabody. "I always thought the five of you had some connection, but I never could quite put it together. The Pentacle. It's too bad things had to end this way. What do you think will happen now?"

"Nobody's sure," Carey said. "It's a pretty complicated matter."

"We've promised the authorities complete cooperation," offered Chambers.

"This reunion certainly hasn't been much fun." Peabody scratched his head. "I hope when we come back for the fifteenth things'll be better."

Carey just nodded, knowing that though he'd never set foot on campus again, he'd spend the rest of his lifetime there. ●

I'd picked him up just because I thought I was doing a good deed. Then he let me in on my plans. It was illegal, of course, and I couldn't resist going along with his scheme! If I played my cards right, something big could come of this!

THE SAMARITAN

by PAUL BISHOP

I DON'T USUALLY PICK UP HITCHHIKERS, SO I DON'T REALLY know what made me stop and pick up this one. Maybe it was intuition, or maybe it just seemed like a good idea at the time.

I saw him standing close to the end of the ramp with his thumb sticking out. He was dressed much the same as I was, in tatty blue jeans and a green army jacket. His long hair was being whipped back by the wind and a hand lettered sign, proclaiming his destination as L.A., rested on top of the knapsack leaning against his left leg.

As I approached he stared directly into my windshield, trying to make eye contact, and with my dirty blond hair tied back in a pony tail and my scraggly beard, figured he recognized a kindred spirit. His face broke into an infectious grin and he wagged his thumb at me a couple of times until he realized I was going to pass him by.

In a last bid to get my attention he brought his hands together in front of his chest, prayer like, and dropped down to his knees in a comical, as opposed to fanatical, fashion.

I had driven past him at this point, but something made me brake to a stop and reverse to where he stood. When I popped up the lock on the passenger door, my new companion clamored inside and stowed his knapsack on the back seat. I said hello and picked up speed down the ramp again.

"Jeez! Am I glad you stopped, man. I've been waiting there for friggin' ever. How far are you going?"

"Not far really, about four exits is all."

"That's okay, man. It's cool. Anything to get off that ramp. Everybody is so paranoid about giving rides these days, think you're a killer or somethin'."

"Yeah, I know what you mean. I even almost blew past you. If I was a straight I'd be history to you now. It's not like it was back in the 60's."

"Hey were you kicking around then? You don't look that old. Jeez, those were the days, man."

"Sure were. I spent time crashed out up by Berkeley, everybody giving you stuff, all the dope you could smoke, all the girls coming across with free love."

"Yeah, man, never had no trouble getting rides then. Heck, I started down from Frisco two days ago and I still ain't made L.A., that wouldn't of happened back then."

OUT OF CORNER OF MY EYE I SAW MY PASSENGER DIG INTO
his jacket pocket and come out with a marijuana joint.

"You want some of this, man?" he asked.

"I better not. I get too mellowed out, and my driving goes to hell. I got a couple of outstanding traffic warrants and if the cops stop us I'm bought and paid for."

"That's tough, man. You don't mind if I light-up, do you? I gotta relax, man."

"Go ahead, just be cool and keep an eye out for cherry tops."

My passenger took out a battered matchbook and toked up, filling the car with the sweet pungent smell of burning marijuana.

"What's your name, man?" he asked while holding the smoke down in his lungs. "Mine's Danny."

"How you doing, Danny?" I said. "I'm Reed."

"You live around here?"

"Yeah, back there where I picked you up. I'm just on my way over to my sister's for dinner."

"Nice area. What do you do for work?"

"Construction. Bad time of year though. No work and no bread."

"That's too bad, man." Danny paused for a second, took another hit off his joint, and turned to look at me.

"Look, man, I'm kind of in a jam," he said. "I got to get to L.A. as soon as possible. I'm already late for an appointment which means a lot of bread in my pocket — and my head on a platter if I'm much later."

"Yeah, so?" I prompted.

"Well look, if you can give me a ride all the way to where I'm going I can score you off some really clean cocaine."

"Where you going to get the nose candy from?"

Danny was silent for a second. I could feel him looking at me, judging me.

"Can I trust you, man?" he asked finally.

"If your appointment is that important, I don't see as you have much choice. The offramp I'm gonna drop you off at isn't much busier than the one I picked you up at."

Danny chewed his lip as he thought that over. He took a last toke off his joint and flipped the roach out the window. I was starting to get a contact high from the smoke in the close quarters of the car and rolled down my window as well.

"Look man," Danny started again, "I'm muling two pounds of righteous snow in my knapsack for a buyer in the valley. It's worth two grams to you if you get me to him."

My heart skipped a beat. "What are you saying? At a hundred and twenty dollars a gram that's over a million bucks of cocaine you're hauling! What happens if the cops stop you?!"

Danny laughed. "Hasn't happened yet, man. As long as you play the game, watch where you hitchhike and look like you smell bad, the pigs don't want to mess with you. Anyway if it gets hairy, I'm ready." Danny hauled a .25 caliber automatic out from his groin area. "If the cops shake you down it's a good place to keep your heat. Most pigs don't like to get too friendly."

"Hey! Put that thing away!"

"It's cool, it's cool." Danny laughed putting the palm-sized gun back in its hiding spot. "What's it gonna be? You gonna take me all the way, man?"

"Where we going?"

"Well all *right!* Take the Desoto Avenue offramp north and I'll direct you from there."

"Okay, but I still got one small problem. I need gas and I don't got no cash. I was going to hit my sister up for a loan to tide me over to payday. I'll have to stop there first."

"It's cool, man. I'll pop for the gas and throw you a ten spot to cover you."

"Hey, that's great, thanks. I'll pull off here and fill up."

I SMILED AT MY NEW FOUND FRIEND AND PULLED OFF THE freeway at Kanan Road and turned into a convenient service station.

A young attendant with punk rock hair started to pump gas into my bug, but it was obvious he wasn't about to do anything else.

"I'm gonna have to call my sister so she doesn't worry where I am. That okay with you?" I asked Danny.

Danny's eyes filled with suspicion. "I don't know, man. How do I know you're not gonna try and set something up to rip me off?"

"Hey no way, man! You can listen in if you want."

"Okay, that sounds all right."

Both Danny and I walked over to the pay phone on the corner of the lot and stepped inside. I dropped in a dime and dialed the number from memory.

"His Sis," I said when I got a feminine answer on the other end, "it's me, Reed." Danny crowded his ear over the receiver. "My car's broken down out here at Pierce and I can't make dinner." Danny pulled the phone away from me and covered the mouthpiece.

"What's Pierce, man?"

"Take it easy. It's where I go to night school. I'm supposed to be there now, and I don't want her to know I didn't go."

Danny shoved the phone back at me.

"Yeah, Sis, I'm still here. No, I don't need you to come get me, I can fix it myself but it'll take a little while. Tell Kenny I'll be by tomorrow, and I'll play ball with him then."

Danny and I listened for a minute to a lecture from the other end of the phone about keeping my car in better shape, and then I said goodbye and hung up.

I grinned sheepishly at Danny, "She's the oldest of the family. Ever since our folks passed on, she has this need to play mom. She's not satisfied with just raising her own kid."

Danny shrugged, "No sweat, man, let's get going."

Danny paid off the attendant and we hit the freeway again. Another joint appeared in Danny's hand and he lit it up as he settled back in his seat.

"Where does the dope come from?" I asked.

"Oh, man, it's a sweet little deal I got goin'." Smoking the dope was making him talkative. "I pick up the cocaine from a lab in Mexico every other month and bring it up to the border. Then I wait for a load of wetbacks to try and make a crossing to the land of milk and honey, setting off the border ground sensors as they go. While the border patrol is busy rounding up the illegals, I slip across on their blind side and just keep walking until I get past the check point just below San Diego. Then I start hitchhiking.

"I have two delivery points, one in L.A. and the other in San Francisco. I usually hit L.A. first, but this trip I got a ride straight through from San Diego to San Francisco. I couldn't turn that down, but it kind of made me late getting to L.A. 'cause I didn't have the same kind of luck coming back down. The kind of bucks I make doing this I'll be able to retire by the time I'm thirty-five."

"Sounds like you got it licked, man," I said. "You think these

people you deliver to need any more help? It would sure beat nailing studs and laying shingles."

"Hell, I don't know, man! I'm taken care of, and that's all I'm worried about. I got a partner who meets me at the delivery points and handles the money for me. You know he's kind of like my banker, and I split some of the cash with him. But I don't want nobody else trying to muscle in and steal my thunder, so don't get no fancy ideas. You ain't got my kind of contacts."

"Take it easy. I was just asking, you know? I'd be a fool not to want to try and see if there was anything in it for me."

"Well there ain't, okay?"

"Okay, man. Just asking is all."

I PULLED OFF AT THE DESOTO EXIT AND HEADED NORTH across the valley. We passed the large Data Products building on the left and the agricultural fields of the local junior college on the right. As we crossed through the yellow tri-light at Erwin Street, I glanced nervously at the black and white police car parked at the curb, but he made no move to come after me and argue about whether the light had been red or yellow.

We kept going straight until Danny told me to turn left on Sherman Way into an area dominated by rundown businesses and deteriorating apartment complexes covered with barrio graffiti. We crossed Canoga Avenue and turned left down a small side street. When Danny pointed to a driveway, I pulled the car through a gap in the fence that surrounded a medium size rock quarry. A high metal fence surrounded the quarry above which only the tall necks of cranes and the tops of other heavy machinery could be seen, looking like so many obsolete dinosaurs.

Inside the quarry activity appeared to be at a minimum. Danny directed me as we drove around several large mountains of gravel and skirted the excavations. Danny pointed to a dented trailer with an office sign on its front door and told me to pull up next to it. A cloud of following dust caught up with us as I stopped the car and settled lightly over the Toyota pickup, an already dirty Porsche and a year old Cadillac that were parked there.

I ASKED DANNY IF HE WANTED ME TO WAIT OUTSIDE FOR him, but as he got out of the car he signaled for me to follow him. As we started to walk towards the trailer, I notice a gnarled workmanlike face peering at us out of the lone window. It stared at us for a moment and then disappeared only to emerge a moment later atop a barrel-

shaped body that had opened the front door.

We entered the trailer and the barrel closed the door behind us, leaving himself on the outside. Three business types were gathered around a paper littered desk and as we moved in to the room one of them stood up and moved over by an almost empty water cooler propped up in one corner. He had a bulge under his right arm which had nothing to do with any sort of glandular problem.

The man sitting at the desk had the face of a bulldog and a body to match, but instead of dog hair though he wore a three hundred dollar grey pinstripe suit. An unlit but well chewed Corona cigar stuck out of his left fist like an extension of his index finger, which at some time or another had been chopped off at the first knuckle.

Behind the bulldog stood the man I took to be Danny's banker. That was a fairly safe assumption as the man had taken obvious pains to resemble a member of that profession. Cool and lean, he stood casually relaxed with one hand on the back of the bulldog's chair.

Nobody spoke for a couple of beats and the hackles on the back of my neck started to rise. Finally bulldog shifted in his seat and his voice growled out calmly but filled with menace.

"I'm really unhappy with you, Danny." Danny made to interrupt, but the bulldog cut him off with a point of his Corona. "I've been in this stink hole for two hours at a time for the last three days waiting for you to show up. I've lost customers, money and, more importantly, time. And now when you finally do show up you bring a stranger with you. You're real stupid making me unhappy, Danny. Who else are you going to find to deal with if I cut you off and put out the word that you're unreliable, eh?"

"Hey, be cool, Mr. Mannicotti, I'm sorr —" Danny started.

"Don't tell me to be cool, you little scrote! I oughta just kill you and walk away, cut my losses!" Mannicotti came snarling out of his chair. When he stood up, his beefy shoulders hunched back, making the impression of a bulldog even stronger.

"I'm sorry, I'm sorry! I won't let it happen again okay, man? Okay?" Danny threw his hands out in front of him, palms up as if trying to ward off an unseen blow. "Hey, like I've got the goods, man. We can do business right now and then we can get out of here, okay?"

Mannicotti looked at me. "Who's this dirtbag you brought with you?"

"Hey, this is Reed, man. He's cool, he's an old friend. Came out to give me a ride when I got stuck."

Danny's eyes flicked over at me to see how I was taking the old friend schtick, and I don't mind telling you that my knees were shaking

a little bit what with all this talk about cutting losses. I felt like a turkey with his neck on the chopping block but I still tried on a smile for Mannicotti, trying not to look like I was wearing a sign stuck to my forehead saying "kill me."

Mannicotti stared back at me but didn't return my smile.

"Search him, Tony," Mannicotti growled.

TONY PUSHED HIMSELF AWAY FROM THE WATER COOLER and spun me around so I was leaning with my palms pressed against the far wall. I felt Tony's hands moving roughly over my body, and he had no qualms about getting friendly like Danny told me the cops wouldn't.

When he was satisfied, he moved back to the water cooler and I turned around to face the crowd again.

"Okay, let me see the snow," Mannicotti said to Danny while he still gave me the evil eye.

"Sure, man, sure. I got it right here," Danny said, seemingly relieved to have something to do. He reached inside his knapsack and brought out two clear plastic bags containing the cocaine and set them on the desk.

Mannicotti in return picked up a briefcase from beside the desk chair and handed it to Danny's banker. Danny moved over next to his partner and started to help him count the money.

"Hey Mr. O, it looks like we're in the chips again," said Danny, patting his partner on the back with one hand and riffling bills with the other.

When the counting was done, the briefcase was closed and the banker walked out of the trailer with it after giving Danny one of the banded bundles of twenties. The whole time he was there the banker hadn't said a word.

"Hey, Danny, what about the blow you promised me?" I asked as I watched Mannicotti snort up a sample of his newly acquired goods.

Danny came over all smiles and put his arm around me.

"Yeah, yeah. Okay, man, it's right here," he said, reaching into his knapsack again and coming out with two small amber vials filled with the stuff that dreams are made of. "I'll give you a couple more after we split, man, okay?"

That was okay by me as I just wanted to get out of there and get back out into the open.

Mannicotti put the cocaine in another briefcase and handed it to Tony.

"I'll see you again in a couple of months, creep, and you better not

be late again!"

"Yes sir, Mr. Mannicotti. I'll be here I promise, on time and everything." Danny appeared to be real good at groveling.

Mannicotti started for the door, followed by Tony and Danny, with me bringing up the rear. As Mannicotti stepped away from the trailer an ominous yet feminine voice boomed out from behind my VW.

"Freeze! Police! Move and die, turkeys!"

THERE WAS A BRISTLING OF REVOLVERS AND SHOTGUNS AS the narcs surrounding the trailer came out into the open, but Tony and Danny still changed directions and started back towards the trailer's interior.

I dropped my shoulder into Danny's side as he started to grope for his hidden gun, and drove him straight into Tony. We all went down in a heap, and I drove my fist into Danny's groin again and again until he curled up in a ball of pain, putting up no resistance when I tore his gun out of its hiding place and stuck it in his ear.

When the dust settled, I could see that Tony was proned out face down in the dirt and Mannicotti was sprawled over the hood of my VW with his tail between his legs. Sybil Lyman, my narcotics partner and the "sister" I had called from the gas station, was walking towards me all smiles and dimples.

"You okay, Reed?" she asked, helping me to haul a dazed Danny up off of the ground and into the arms of another narc.

"God! Am I glad you remembered that silly telephone code we worked out when we first started working together in case one of us got into some kind of unplanned caper. I thought for a while though that I was all alone here until the first guy left and I didn't hear his car start up."

I looked over to where Mr. O, Danny's banker sat in the back of a plain clothes car.

"Well I have to admit that it took me a couple of seconds after you called me Sis to figure out what was going on and that it wasn't just some crank with a wrong number. And even after I caught on, it was a panic to get enough plain clothes cars to cover all four sides of Pierce College. In fact it was a black and white unit that picked you up on Desoto when you passed the school by. How in the world did you get into this in the first place?"

"You wouldn't believe me if I told you. I just thought I was being a good Samaritan by giving a guy a ride. Let's head for the station and I'll get started writing this caper up. Remind me to call my sister and tell her I'm going to be late."

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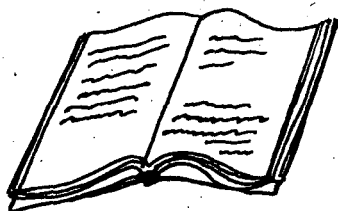
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STIFF COMPETITION



BOOK REVIEWS

by JOHN BALL

This month has seen the debut of two new lady private eyes, one in London and the other in Chicago.

The first of these is Anna Lee, the creation of Liza Cody in her book *Dupe*. This work won the Creasey Award as the best first novel to be published in England in 1980. Miss Lee works for a difficult boss who heads a private investigation agency. When the daughter of a wealthy family is killed in a traffic accident, her parents are not satisfied and want an investigation. Eventually, as the reader is sure to suspect, the "accident" is found to be murder, but we are never told who is guilty. The suggestion is made that a dead man may have been responsible, but there is no clear-cut resolution. Also, Miss Lee has such a glacial temperament, some readers may be turned off as a result. (Scribners, \$10.95)



Our second lady in the private investigative field is V. (for Victoria) I. Warshawski, a cop's daughter who is definitely competent and who operates her own agency in the windy city. She has a law degree and

some sound schooling in police street defense tactics. She appears in *Indemnity Only* by Sara Paretsky. Although she is a remarkably independent person, we must admit that we find her considerably more engaging than Miss Lee, her British counterpart. Like many another private eye, she sticks on a case long after she no longer has a viable (and paying) client. She mixes with a thinly-disguised Teamsters Union, a large insurance company, and a particularly dangerous Mob scam. She comes through all this in fine style, much better than might be expected in a first novel. We like this lady, we would hire her, and also invite her out for drinks. (Dial, \$14.95)

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Victorian murder mysteries are quite the thing now, and we have a new one called *Resurrection Row* by Anne Perry. Despite her youth, this is the author's fourth novel and a delightful one. Bodies that have been safely buried with all due honors keep turning up in bizarre places, one sitting on his own tombstone. The exhumations continue, but there is no sign of murder. But wait! . . . The Victorian era is not quite the same as pictured so splendidly by the late John Dickson Carr and by Peter Lovesey, but the author knows her business and she turns in a neat job that we have to call superior. Miss Perry is a lady who will bear watching. (St. Martin's Press, \$9.95)

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And here comes another lady author, this one the experienced Elizabeth Lemarchand, with her new book, *Nothing to Do With the Case*. This is the classic English village whodunit distinguished by the fact that all of the police, and there are quite a few, know exactly what they are doing and conduct an investigation that is notable for its efficiency and thoroughness. Virginia Gould is keeping house for an elderly relative when he meets with an accident. She inherits a tidy sum and for a time is under suspicion until a thoroughly reliable witness clears her completely of any possible involvement in the accident. Nevertheless, she pulls up stakes and seeks out a new life in a tiny village. She is pursued by grasping rich relatives who are not satisfied with their own generous take and who both rob and use her. There is an astonishingly quick romance for her and, it must be added, the book's ending is weak. The clues are not given to the reader and there is no way to spot the killer until after the fact. Otherwise, a nice, conventional British job. (Walker and Co., \$9.95)



John Wyllie writes fascinating stories of Africa; he is so good at it he brings to mind Arthur Upfield and what he did for Australia. Once again Dr. Quarshie, his accomplished black physician and detective, is with us in *The Long Dark Night of Baron Samedi*. Much of this book harks back to the days of the slave trade and to the brutality with which newly captured slaves were treated. There is a considerable cast, one of the most important and resourceful being Mrs. Quarshie. While this is, indeed, a murder mystery, the rich use of the African background overshadows everything else — and that is all to the good. If you haven't tried Wyllie yet, don't miss him. (Doubleday Crime Club, \$10.95)



A most witty and entertaining book is *Murder at Moose Jaw* by Tim Heald. Actually most of the action takes place in Toronto in the winter-time. A supposedly ineffective investigator from the British Board of Trade, where he is held in appropriate low esteem, looks into the murder of a local tycoon. He gets involved with the Royal Canadian Mounted Police and also with a romantic young lady, but that is foredoomed as our hero is married; almost too much so. Mr. Heald must be applauded for giving us, near the end, some excellent plot twists that are not contrived, and a genuine surprise to the reader. This one is fun to read and delightfully written. It is another in the author's Simon Bognor series; he's made us want to read the others. (Doubleday Crime Club, \$10.95)



While some of the biggest publishing houses are turning out books that tend to fall apart at first reading, Arkham House continues to show how it should be done. The latest offering from this publisher is *Tales From the Nightside* by Charles L. Grant. There is a small select list of those who have mastered the story of subtle horror, and Mr. Grant is a good candidate to join their ranks. His pictures are eerie and sometimes undefined; the menace is felt rather than seen, but it is there and somehow it is worse for being all but invisible. You may enjoy this volume of short stories as bedtime reading. That's fine, but not isolated somewhere in an old dark house. Make sure you can turn the lights on and go get something to eat from the icebox, if you need

it. The writing craftsmanship, you will find, is definitely superior. (Arkham House, Sauk City, Wisconsin 53583, \$11.95)

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PAPERBACK NOTES: At this late date no one needs to be told that the Father Brown stories of G. K. Chesterton are cornerstones of the literature. The original five volumes have just been reprinted by Penguin in order to tie with the appearance of Father Brown on the superb TV series *Mystery*. Four of the books are \$3.50, one is \$2.95 . . . The immensely popular Don Pendleton has taken his Mack Bolan on a new crusade. Continuing the Executioner series, his man is now on the trail of the KGB as it operates a terrorist and narcotics organization. The title is *Double Crossfire* and the action is all yours for \$1.95. The publisher is Gold Eagle, a division of Harlequin . . . Rex Stout wrote a number of early mysteries that are now quite hard to find. One of them is *The Broken Vase*, just reprinted by Bantam for \$2.50. In the same series is *The Rubber Band* for \$2.25; Nero Wolfe appears in this latter work . . . Bantam is also offering some of the less easy to find works of John Dickson Carr; the latest to be made available is *The White Priory Murders* (as by Carter Dickson) \$2.50 . . . Dell has just published the latest selection by Murder Ink: V. C. Clinton-Baddeley's *No Case for the Police*, a very good entertainment for only \$2.25. ●



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MIKE'S MAIL

HOLES IN THE COVER

A suggestion: how about subscription coupons, etc, being put on a page instead of front and back covers. I save all my books, and cutting out a square in the cover messes up the book. I really enjoy my magazines — all the little extras are a big bonus. I confess I read through them, letters, book reviews, etc., before I start the stories. I even have a pen in hand when I read the Mike Shayne story, to mark out or change all the *big redheads*, etc. Makes me feel a little like a writer.

Mrs. Corkie Everett
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*That's a good suggestion. However, no matter where the subscription coupon is, you needn't cut it out. Right up there above the coupon it says **CLIP OR COPY THIS COUPON** — so if you don't want a hole in the book you just copy down the information from the coupon, or make a photocopy of the page. As long as you send us the information we need (and the money, of course), we can get those *big redheads* out to you every month.*

MORE PULP

Just read the February issue. Glad to see that you are running short-short stories, my favorites. Enjoyed "Water in a Teacup" and "Chop Shop."

Since I knew they'd have surprise endings, I played a game. I stopped reading about one paragraph before the ending and tried to figure out the ending. The horror ending of "Chop Shop" had me stumped.

I go back to the heyday of pulps when there were at least a dozen detective story magazines. One popular formula was the "biter bit." Here the person trying to commit a crime had his plan backfire. The story would conclude with the nasty one being bit himself!

Like the wonderful era of the Big Swing Bands, I have often wondered why the wonderful era of the pulps met its demise.

Carry on, MSMM!

Fred Ebel

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According to pop-culture historian Ron Goulart, the pulps were killed by competition from comic books, paperbacks, and television, a public that wanted new formats, and rising production costs that outdistanced revenue. I was sorry to see the pulps die out. The occasional pulp and other nostalgic touches in MSMM seem to be going over with readers of all ages, so unless there's an overwhelming barrage of outraged letters against it, I'll continue.

AND EVEN MORE PULP

Just provide me the motivation and I'm ready to research anything, especially things pertaining to the past. Which is exactly why I majored in history at college: I enjoy looking information up and I love delving into the past.

The Toniks' ultimatum that if MIKE SHAYNE doesn't start publishing pulp-related material again they won't purchase

another issue got me off and running. What does "pulp-related" material constitute, I wondered. Next thing I knew I was at the library seeking the answer.

"Pulp" originally referred to paper made from chemically treated pulp wood, a low-grade of wood. The process was invented in the late nineteenth century. Pulp paper is characteristically coarse, absorbent and high in acid content, which means that it becomes easily yellowed and brittle. Most of all, it's cheap. Well, thank the Lord for the invention of a cheap, readily manufactured paper. That's what started the glorious pulp revolution, beginning in the 1880's and still going strong in this the Space Age. The cheaply printed pulp magazines put magazines at affordable prices into the hands of an ever increasing literate public. Most of these folks who bought up the pulps simply couldn't afford to buy the high-grade glossies of the day: **LESLIE'S ILLUSTRATED WEEKLY**, **VANITY FAIR**, **HARPER'S WEEKLY**, **ST. NICHOLAS**, **BLACKWOODS**, **LIBERTY**, to name a few. But they still had that desire to read, for knowledge and for pure entertainment. And the pulps answered that need.

Naturally, the people who subscribed to the glossies looked down on the pulp-buyers. They assumed, just because of the often garish appearance of a pulp, that the folks who devoured them were uneducated and unsophisticated. As you can see: it was a bad case of snobbery.

At any rate, there were excellently written pulps and there were badly written pulps, just as there was good and bad writing in the glossies. I looked at turn-of-the-century **LESLIES AND VANITY FAIRS** and the writing isn't all of Nobel quality, no matter what those magazines' editors probably assumed.

Pulp stories are just stories which happened to be printed in magazines made with pulp paper. I enjoy **MIKE SHAYNE** the way it is. Of course, I have my preferences of authors and types of stories but lots of people with diverse personal tastes read your magazine and you've got to try catering to us all — so we just have to patiently wait our turns. And it never hurts to learn to like new authors and other types of stories. I hope **MIKE SHAYNE** just keeps getting better and better. That's all I want!

Gail Habbyslaw
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Your definition of pulp stories has merit, since there was a variety of stories, themes and styles in the pulp magazines. Some of these were hurriedly written, because of deadlines and low payment, and they show it. Others can stand up today with the best being written. However, the overwhelming effect of the pulp package was one of sensationalism, with fast-paced, emotion-stirring, often purplish prose, and this is what most people think of. Potential pulp readers were treated to this philosophy at first glance — via the front cover, usually an action scene sometimes involving a scantily-clad damsel in distress. The interior illustrations were also part of the pulp flavor. Not all of the drawings were great art, but a lot of them were exceptionally well done. MSMM used to carry spot illustrations, not a bad idea, but the drawings (in my humble but editorially omnipotent opinion) were too crude, so I discontinued them. MSMM is the only mystery magazine using full-color art covers, as in the Good Old Days of the pulps, a practice I intend to continue. Some of the cover art is not as good as I'd like, but others are pretty good, and some are terrific. Will MSMM get better? If it doesn't, it won't be for lack of trying!

ANOTHER PULP FAN


Although I do pick up and enjoy *Mike Shayne Mystery Magazine* fairly regularly — especially when you go nostalgic, as with (October, 1980) the “Crimes in Other Times” number, which I enjoyed very much — I haven’t managed to get all recent numbers, although I do scan them at the stands to see if you have any of the old “pulp” flavor or — an important “or” — another full-page illustration by the superb Frank Hamilton (have you seen his work in Will Murray’s *Duende History of the Shadow Magazine*?) Now, I really like what Hamilton and Avallone are doing (even if it is only a couple of pages) to pay tribute to the good old days of the pulps.

Keep on publishing new Hamilton illustrations (the one for Fu Manchu, in the December, 1981, issue is a beauty). A thought: Why don’t you have Hamilton do a few illustrations for some of the stories in an issue, specifically for the Mike Shayne lead or for a suitably nostalgic short or novelet further back? And why not persuade some of your professional contributors (Avallone? Pronzini?) to do some pulp-flavored shorts (serious or pastiche)

with the Shadow or the Spider or the Phantom Detective as the central (or, perhaps, a back-up) character if the attitude is modern but the atmosphere pulpish?

As for other ideas: I — as you would guess — would like to see some Black Mask-style shorts or novelets balancing the multitude of "contemporary" tough vignettes taking up a bit too much space. Still, there are so few such magazines still extant that I am glad to see you appearing monthly alongside the large-size but not always as interesting slick-paper companions on the stands.

Joseph Wrzos
70 Charles Ave.
West Caldwell, NJ 07006



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